

**THE
EXTRAORDINARY CONFESSIONS
OF
DIANA PLEASE**

THE EXTRAORDINARY CONFESSIONS OF DIANA PLEASE

HERE "ENGLISHED" FROM THE ORIGINAL
SHORTHAND NOTES, IN FRENCH, OF M. LE
MARQUIS DE C——, A FRIEND TO WHOM
SHE DICTATED THEM,

BY

BERNARD CAPES

AUTHOR OF

'THE LAKE OF WINE' "PLOTS" ETC. ETC.

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INTRODUCTORY

"I am convinced she rivalled, at fifty, the exquisite Diane de Poitiers herself, in the brightness of her wit and the perfection of her form, and might have passed as triumphantly a like test of the marble."

THE MARQUIS DE C—— in his "Foreword."

IF the public seeks any apology for this introduction to it, at a late date, of the extraordinary woman whose self-dictated Memoirs form the staple of the following pages, it must look for it in the references of her contemporaries; it will be far from gathering it from her own autobiography.

Diane Rosemonde de St. Croix, (to give her her proper mother-title) considered that she owed to Romance, in a glowing age, what, in a practical one, is conceded by a thousand dull and petty vanities to a vulgar curiosity—her personal reminiscences. She had at least the justification of her qualities, and the good fortune to find, in her latter-day friend, the Marquis de C——, an enthusiastic historian of them. In the question of their appeal, one way or the other, to the English reader, the present transcriber (from the original French notes) must hold himself responsible both for choice and style.

Madame de St. Croix was a "passionist," as the French called Casanova; and, indeed, she had many points in common with that redoubtable adventurer: an unappeasable vagabondism; a love of letters; an ardent imagination; an incorruptible self-love; and, lastly, what we may term an exotic orthodoxy. If, subscribing to the universal creed which makes man's soul his fetish, she worshipped an exacting god, she was

at least always ready to sacrifice the world to gratify it, and now, no doubt, very logically sings among the angels.

In the matter of her more notorious characteristics, M. de C——, lest her part on earth should suffer misconstruction by the censorious, is so good as to speak with some show of finality. "I deny," he says, "the title adventuress to my charming and accomplished friend. It is nothing if not misleading. Every day we venture something, for love, for hunger, for ambition. He who deviates from rice and barley-water, venturing on spiced dishes, makes every time an assault on his epigastrium. He who is not content with an ignoble mediocrity, though he do no more than take pains with a letter, is a candidate for fame. And as for love, it does not exist on the highway. Why should it imply distinction to call a man an adventurer, and be invidious to style a woman adventuress? Ulysses dallying in *Ææa* is surely no more honourable a sight than Godiva traversing Coventry in an adorable *deshabille*. To have the wide outlook, the catholic sympathy—is that to merit defamation? No, it is to be heroically human. Better sin like an angel, I say, than be a sick devil and virtuous."

It remains only to mention that the present transcript conducts no further than to the finish of a dramatic period of Madame de St. Croix's story; and to that, even, at the expense of a considerable lacuna (referred to in its place), which no research has hitherto been successful in filling. It is hoped, however, that, in what is given, enough will be found to interest. B. C.

[*Note*.—An ingenious etymologist supplies a likely derivation for the "duck-stone," so often mentioned in the text, from the slavic *dook* or *duk*, signifying to spirit away. Accepting this genesis, the duck-stone, given to Mrs. Please by the gypsy, becomes the *dook*, or *bewitching*-stone, and is imbued with whatever virtues our faith or our credulity may suggest.]

THE EXTRAORDINARY CONFESSIONS OF DIANA PLEASE¹

I

I MAKE MY DÉBUT

AT my friend M. de C——'s instigation I sit down in the noon of my life to talk of its morning.

I look first to your gallantry, my dear Alcide, to see that this statement is not misconstrued. That I have a past argues nothing of my remoteness from it. In comparison with the immortality which is surely to be mine, everything on this side is youth. I am seventeen, or thirty-seven, or whatever I choose; and I intend that Heaven, whenever it calls me, shall find me irresistible. Possessing all the ages, it cannot grudge me my arbitrary disposition of my own little term.

Now, tell your friends, my dear Alcide, that to succeed in life one must never ask a woman her age or a man his intentions; and so we shall all be comfortable.

I owe my mother the most whimsical of grudges, my existence. I will nickname her the Comtesse de l'Ombre, and so shall abuse no confidences in relating of my debt to her, and to "Lovelace," her collaborator in the romance of which I am the heroine. She was very beautiful; and he, an English cadet of distinction, was an aristocratic paragon.

¹ Born *circa* 1770.

At the age of sixteen, convinced of the hollowness of life, she had taken the veil, and become the Sister Agnès of the Communauté de Madelonnettes, Notre Dame de la Charité, in Paris, whence a year later she was transferred to an English branch of the house. Hence and from her duty my father, whom she had approached upon a begging mission, succeeded unhappily in inveigling her.

To the day of her death my mother bore the disfiguring sign of a little cross on her breast. It has succeeded to me, but in a faint reflection, a *grain de beauté*, only. I will tell you, in a word, the story of my inheritance.

The ladies of les Madelonnettes had, in inviting all the feminine vices to their inauguration ceremony, with the object to pension them off handsomely, overlooked the bad fairy Jealousy. Thou knowest, Alcide, the meanness of this witch. To revenge herself, she cast Lovelace into their midst, as Eris cast the apple of discord upon the nuptial board of Thetis; and poor de l'Ombre was made the consequent scapegoat. Driven forth in ignominy from the fold, she could not suffer so much but that one, over zealous or jealous, must strike her an envious blow across the bosom, on which she always wore a little crucifix, the gift of her father. The ebony cut in and left an indelible scar, to which I was to succeed in pathetic earnest of my origin. It has never ceased to be a symbol to me of the vanity of self-renunciation. How can we deny *ourselves*, and not deny One after whose image we are made?

I was born in a lodging at Brighthelmston, whither my father had conveyed my mother. The town, which has always possessed an attraction for me, was at that time a very paltry affair of scattered houses, to which the mumpish or melancholic came periodically to salt their spleens against a fresh course of dissipations. Locality has never, however, influenced my temper. The perfume of contentment breathes from within, and is not to be affected by soil or surroundings. Let us who have good constitutions continue, as the way is, to

accept them for virtues, and to abhor the dyspeptic as unclean. Let us have the discretion to ask no questions of our neighbours about what we don't understand in this entertaining comedy of life. So shall we justify ourselves to ourselves, and avoid being made uncomfortable. Is it not so, my friend?

My mother had never, I do believe, had a doll till I came. She was very young, even then, and could not tire of playing with me in our pretty cottage near the Steine. And I responded in all endearing gaiety and innocence, with the very trustfulness of which she must, I fear, have come to reproach her apostasy.

Maybe she did, for, as time went on, I can recall a cloud settling upon her brow—the shadow, perhaps, of the yoke under which she was passing from girlhood to womanhood. I was already four *when she came of age*. O, *mon chéri*! think of the tragedy of those italics! And think of me, a child of a precocious observation, and little ears as pinkly susceptible to murmurs as the inside of a shell, doomed to wake—wake to some misty understanding of the unusual in our relations!

By and by I even confided my suspicions to my father, whom I adored, and who visited us occasionally, coming down from town very elegant and *mondain* and in great company. He laughed, and then frowned over at mamma, who returned his look steadily.

"Dear sir," she said only, "the child is growing very critical. Do not encourage her, and make this cross harder than I can bear."

"But I too have a cross," I said; "only it is little and faint, and not blushing like *maman's*."

My papa laughed again, and again frowned, saying, "It is a fact, and hard on the infant, who has done nothing to deserve it."

Then he pushed me from him, and rose, and, going to the door, turned at it with a peevish face.

"I weary of these heroics," said he. "If you persist in them, remember that you are qualified, more than ever, for les Madelonnettes."

He went ; and she cried out, as if over some dreadful awakening. But thenceforth, for some reason, our confidences grew estranged. I loved my poor mamma so well, that I think she should not have responded by striving to make heir to her melancholy the innocent cause of it. At the root of all our moral revolt is a sense of the injustice of original sin. I, at least, had done nothing to make me unhappy.

Presently I was given a governess, my dear careless father's nominee. She was French, a *ci-devant maîtresse de pension*, very lazy and self-indulgent, and, if not sleeping, she was always ogling for unattached beaux. Vicious and insolent, she delighted in prompting me to reflections on my mother's self-reserve, and "honour" was as much in her mouth as false teeth. I learned nothing from her but indecorum and innuendo.

One day—for the moral to her teaching (it was when I was ten years old)—I was playing truant on the downs, when I saw a small smutty baby crawl from under a bush into the road at the very moment that a carriage, wildly driven, was approaching. I had just time to notice the gilded splendour of the equipage, and, perhaps,—let us be frank, my friend,—to be inspired to heroism by the sight, before I leapt and snatched up the child from under the very feet of the galloping horses. As the chariot thundered by, an elegantly groomed head thrust itself from the window, and a ruffled hand, waving to me standing there unhurt but bewildered, flung back a gold coin into the dust. I turned my back immediately, disillusioned, by the insolence of the acknowledgment, as to the disinterested quality of my deed, and the more so as the baby was, *parler franchement*, decidedly unpleasant. I put the imp down, and began to re-order my little ruffled plumes. Wouldst thou hear what they were, my Alcide? I can recall them at this hour: A dainty gipsy hat knotted to a blue ribbon ; a stomacher laced over with silver twist, and a skirt to the ankles, both of flowered lustring ; three pair of ruffles at my bare elbows ; a

black solitaire at my neck, and black shoes with red heels and the prettiest of paste buckles.

Alas! how better than our sins of yesterday do we remember the stockings we wore to sin in! Let me, for penance, concede to history these my failings. I was, in fact, colourless in complexion, like tinted porcelain, with what my detractors used to call spun-glass hair, and the eyes of a Dresden shepherdess. And I was not at that time light on my feet, with which my volatile spirits were always at odds.

Now, as I smoothed my skirt, I was aware of a mad gipsy woman hurrying from the bank towards me, and crying and gesticulating as she came. She caught up the infant, and, finding it unharmed, put it down again, and fawned upon me inarticulate. Then she broke off to curse the distant carriage up hill and down, and finally went to pick up the coin from the very spot where she had not failed to mark its fall.

"It is yours," she said, striding back to me. "Take it!"

"You can keep it," I answered, with my little nose in the air. "A lady does not want for money."

She slipped it into her pocket, and fell on her knees before me.

"Nor beauty, nor love, nor silken raiment," she cried; "and yet they are not all. Think, my darling! There be no need so wild but the poor grateful gipsy may show a way to gratify it."

I laughed, half annoyed and half frightened; and then, suddenly and oddly, there came into my head the thought of the stocking needle the *gouvernante* was wont to stick into my bosom at meals, to prevent me stooping and rounding my back. Must I confess, my Alcide, that there was ever a time when thy Diane was a little less or more than a sylph?

"Make me light," I said, "so that I can dance without feeling the ground."

She looked at me strangely a moment, then all about her in a stealthy way, while she slipped her hand into her pocket.

"Hush!" she said. "For none other but you. Only tell not of it." And she brought up a little greasy packet, of parchment writ round with characters, like a Hebrew phylactery.

"Have you ever heard tell of the duck-stone?" she whispered.

I shook my head, full of curiosity.

"No," she said, "nor any of thine. It fell from the sky, from another world, deary, that's strange to ours, and the gipsies found it in the wild places of the woods. There was a smell came from it like the sugar of all flowers, and it was as light as foam and as hard as the beaten rocks."

She undid the packet while she spoke, and I saw a number of tiny grey cubes, like frothy pumice-stone, one of which she detached, and gave to me.

"It wrought upon them even to madness," she said, "so that they took and broke it with their mattocks. And, lo! the nameless thing was found in its scattered parts a virtue, even like the poisons which, taken in little, heal. Smell to it when the world is dark, and your brain shall flash into light, like an inn to the tired traveller. Smell to it when your feet go sick and heavy, and you shall feel them like the birds' whose bones are full of wind. But tell not of the gift or giver, lest I die!"

Involuntarily, as she spoke, I had raised the stone to my nostrils. A faint scent as of menthene intoxicated my brain. The downs and the sky swam before me in one luminous mist. Lightness and delight took all my soul and body with rapture. . . .

A shout brought me to myself. I was sitting on the grass, with the duck-stone still tight in my clutch. The gipsy was gone, how long I could not tell, and up the road was coming a second cortège, more brilliant than the former. A dozen young fellows, all volunteer runners and dressed in white, preceded a coach in which sat a rich-apparelled lady, very bold and handsome, and escorted by a splendid cavalcade of gentlemen. It was

the Duchess of Cumberland, who followed her husband to the seaside, as I was to learn by and by; for while I was collecting my drowsy young wits to look, a wonderful thing happened. A horseman drew up with a cry, dismounted, seized and bore me to his saddle, and rode away with me after the carriage. It was my father, flushed and jovial, the pink and Corinthian of his company, as he always was.

He showed no curiosity over the encounter, nor scruple in taking me with him. He was in wild spirits, laughing and teasing, and sometimes he reeled in his saddle in a way to endanger my balance. But the rush of air restored me to myself, and I had the wit, for all my excitement, to slip my charm, which I still held, into a pocket.

So we raced for the town, and presently drew up at the Castle Tavern, where His Royal Highness and his wife, the late Mrs. Horton, were quartering themselves.

The time which followed is confused in my remembrance. I was put in charge of a chambermaid, given a dish of tea and cake, and presently fell fast asleep, to awake smiling and rosy to the summons of my pleasant Clarinda. A lackey in a magnificent scarlet livery awaited me at the door, received me into his arms, and carried me downstairs to a long room blazing with waxlights, where, at a white table spilt all over with a profusion of fruit and crystal, sat a gorgeous company of gentlemen and ladies. Such silks and laces, such feathers and diamonds, I had never in my young day encountered. It was like the most beautiful fair I had ever seen, and the red faces of the company were the coloured bladders bobbing in the stalls. Still, I had not lost my self-possession, when my father reeled round in his chair, and catching me away from the servant, set me on my feet on the table itself.

I was a little confused by the tumult which greeted my exaltation.

"Diane," whispered my father in my ear, "go and tell the duke in a pretty speech that I send my love to him."

I flicked up my skirts, and went off immediately among the fruit and decanters. • My progress was a triumph. The women clapped in artificial enthusiasm, and the men stopped me to kiss my little shoes. And presently down that long lane I saw the duke's smiling face awaiting me. It was not a temperate face, it is true; its thirty-four years were traced upon it in very crooked hieroglyphics. But then—*c'est la dernière touche qu'informe*—the royal star of the garter glittering on the apricot coat beneath made everything handsome. By his side sat the lady his duchess, *née* Luttrell, as brand-new as I to her exaltation. But it was the difference between Hebe and Thais. For all my innocence I felt that, and did not fear her rivalry. I dropped a little curtsey amongst the grapes and melons.

"Monsieur," I said, "my papa wishes to make you a pretty gift, and sends you his love."

He applauded, laughing, as did all the table, and lifted me down to his lap.

"What price for the love?" he cried. "See, I return him a dozen kisses."

He kept me, however, plying me with bonbons, while madam tittered and fanned herself vexedly.

"You will make the little ape sick, Enrico," she said. "Put her down; for shame!"

"I know where to stop," I retorted; and "By God, you do!" said the duke, with a great laugh, and held me tight.

I had a thimbleful of liqueur from his hand by and by, which made me think of the duck-stone. I was the little queen of the evening, and a delight to my father and all.

"Faith!" said a merry Irish *rapparee*, a bit of a courtier captain, "man has been vainly trying to fit woman into the moral scheme ever since she made herself out of his ninth rib, and the fashions out of a fig-leaf; and here, in the eighteenth century Anno Domini, is the result."

I was carried on to the Steine presently by my father,

my little brain whirling. The whole of the Castle Tavern, and every house and shop adjacent, were illuminated; and the lights and crowds of people quite intoxicated me. There were sports enacting on all sides, and I screamed with laughter to see a jingling match, played for a laced coat and hat, in which the jingler, hung with bells, dodged and eluded and dropped between the legs of the blindfolded who sought to capture him. Then there was a foot-race, run by young women for a Holland smock; and I jeered at their self-conscious antics with all my little might, as they went giggling into place, coy and hobbledehoy, and pushed and quarrelled secretly, and stopped the starter to do up their greasy tresses, and then, all but the winner, snivelled over the result, pronouncing it unfair.

Presently I was taken to see an ox roasted whole; and it was here, while we were looking on at the lurid tumult, occurred a rencontre which was to alter the whole current of my life. A fat, drunken sweep in his war-paint jostled my father, who, himself in the fury of wine, turned and felled the beast to the ground. We were isolated from our friends at the moment, and a ring was immediately formed, and the sweep called upon to stand up and pay his interest like a man. He rose, nothing loth, it seemed, and faced my father, who was forced to engage.

"My little 'orse and cart to a red-un that I whop ye!" cried the sweep.

"Done!" answered my father, and they fell to.

I was sure of the result, and stood by quite self-possessed and eager while they fought. A round or two settled it, and there sat the sweep, unable to rise again, with a white tooth dropped on his coat-front.

When my father came away, I clung to him and kissed him in ecstasy. He was quite cool, and only a little breathed; and when, for the honour of sport, he had settled for the sweep's trap to be driven round to his door in the morning, intending to put it up to

auction, he shouldered me laughing, and carried me away amidst cheers.

It was near midnight by then, and, happening upon a royal servant, he gave me into the man's charge, and, in spite of my remonstrances, bade him convey me home. I sulked all the way, and was in no mood, after my excitement, to sympathise with my mother's agitated reception of her truant. She had been near distracted all these hours, thinking me drowned or kidnapped, and could not control a gust of temper upon hearing how I had been employed.

"O, my *maman*," I said saucily, "you must understand I have never been in a convent, and so know how to take care of myself."

It was wicked ; but it was my governess speaking, not I.

II

I AM ABDUCTED

MY mamma questioned me again in the morning about my adventures. She was very hollow-eyed and nervous, which offended me; for for her to appear ill in body or ill at ease in mind seemed to make my own young sanity something that it was wrong or selfish in me to enjoy. I was inconsiderate, no doubt; yet tell me, my Alcide, is it, on the other hand, considerate of dyspepsia to be always wet-blanketing health and contentment? Is not the human the only animal permitted of right to inflict his sickness on his fellows, while in every other community the invalid is "out of the law" of nature? It is thus, undoubtedly, that deterioration is provided against. To be attracted to the sweet and wholesome, and repelled by distemper, is *that* selfishness? If it is not, then am I content to be misunderstood by all others, so long as Heaven will recognise the real love of humankind which inspires my wish to secure its untainted image in myself. There must be a divine virtue in health, seeing how disease is the heir of sin. Is not to sympathise, then, with depression, to condone evil?

I leave the answer to profounder moralists than I, content, in default, to admit that the misery which now befell me was the direct consequence of my wickedness.

"Papa," said I, tossing my head, "gave me to the beautiful duke, and he took me in pledge of the love papa bears him. Will he come and fetch me, do you think, mamma? I shall be glad to belong to one who does not have headaches whenever the sun shines."

She went quite white, and broke into a torrent of French invective.

"I do not understand these hard words," I said. "Is it so they pray in les Madelonnettes?"

My sauciness took her completely aback. She stared at me for some moments in silence, and then cried out suddenly, "God forgive you, Diane, and the vile creature who has instructed you to this, and your father, who I am going at once to ask that she may be removed!"

And she went out, unconsciously consigning me to my fate; and I never saw her again, may Heaven pardon her!

I was a little frightened, though still defiant; and I loitered about the house, singing in my small voice, which, though never an "organ," has always been attractive, so people say.

Presently I remembered my duck-stone, and thought I would seek a case for it. I was alone in the house, for our one maid was gone marketing, and the governess not yet arrived. I went upstairs, and rummaged in my mother's bureaux, and by and by found a tiny silver vinaigrette into which the stone fitted beautifully. Then I went and sat in our little front garden which overlooked the road running to the downs, and there rocked and mused amongst the flowers in a recovered temper. I hoped my father would fetch me again; I expected he would; and so, smiling and dreaming, put up the vinaigrette half-consciously, and sniffed at it. In a moment all sense of my surroundings went from me, and sky and flowers and the grey downs were blended in a rapture of unreality.

I came to myself amidst an impression of jolting. I thought it was night, and that I was suffocating in my bedclothes. I threw something from my face, saw daylight, and cried out incoherently.

Immediately the jerky motion ceased, and a horrible mask looked over and down at me. It was fat and sooty, with a handkerchief, startlingly white by contrast, going obliquely across its forehead.

"Stow that, my pigeon!" it said hoarsely and shortly. But at the first sound of its voice, black inspiration had come upon me in a flood. It was the sweep of my last night's adventure, and he was bearing me away captive in the very little cart he had lost to my father. Whether he had driven that up, sportingly, to time, or was merely escaping in it, I never learned. Anyhow, temptation had come to him recognising me lying there, senseless and unprotected, in the garden, and moved, perhaps, by some sentiment between cupidity and revenge, he had seized the opportunity to kidnap me.

He swung his fat legs over the sitting board, and lifted me up from the midst of the empty bags where he had concealed me. We were in the thick of a little wood, and the pony was quietly cropping at the trackside grass. The sense of loss and isolation, the filth of my condition, the terror of this startled awakening from happy dreams, wrought a desperation in me that was near madness. I screamed and reviled and fought. The man opposed to my struggles just his two hands; but their large persuasive strength, unctuous as they were with soot, was more deadly than any violence. Alas! how the star that lit last night's heaven may be found fallen in the mud to-day, my Alcide!

When I was quiet, he put me up between his knees, and smacked my face twice, deliberately, on either side—not hard, but in a lustful, proprietary way.

"Blow for blow," says he, and lifted the bandage a little from his eye. It was horribly swollen and discoloured.

"Knew how to handle his morleys," he said. "D'ee see't? Now it be my turn."

"What are you going to do with me?" I sobbed.

"Make 'ee my climbing boy," he answered promptly, and with a hideous grin. "You're my luck. D'ee see? Say you're a gurl, and I'll"—He hissed in his breath, and looked at me like a beast of prey.

"There," he ended; "get under, and so much's sniff at your peril!"

Some distant sound, perhaps, startled him. He stuffed me into my former position, and, covering me again with the bags, turned and clicked up his pony. I lay in a half faint, scarce daring to breathe, so utterly had this monster succeeded in subduing me. I cried, incessantly but quietly, hearing hour by hour the wheels grind under my ear, till the sound and physical exhaustion induced in me a sort of delirium. All this time, the hope of pursuit and rescue never occurred to me, I believe. Did they occur to Proserpine having once felt the inhumanity of her sooty abductor?

But now all of a sudden the anguish grew unendurable. I must move or die. And at the moment I became conscious of the vinaigrette still clutched convulsively in my little fist.

Sure never death offered a sweeter release. Very softly I raised it, and found oblivion. I might have sought to use it on my enemy, and escape; but, alas! the unsophisticated mind of the child could compass no such artifice.

We went on all day, as I realised during the intervals of my waking, by the unfrequented roads, jolting, loitering, sometimes in lonely places halting to rest the pony. The moral force my master (as I must now call him) put upon himself to avoid the wayside taverns, is the most convincing proof of his tenacity.

At last, a thicker darkness descended upon me, lying there in hopeless apathy, and night and sleep stretched their shroud over my miseries.

I awoke to rough movement and the sound of voices. My master was carrying me into a little ill-lighted cottage, which stood solitary upon the edge of a common. Sharp and brilliant, at no great distance, in a souging night, sparkled the first lamps of a town.

I was borne into a tiny room, where something, covered with a cloth, lay stretched upon a rickety table. My master put me to the ground, and stood back to regard me. Another man, an expressionless sweep like

himself, but gaunt and bent-shouldered, joined silent issue in this scrutiny.

"Well," said the latter at length, "they'll fit right enow; but damn the exchange!"

He stopped to cough rendingly; then went on—

"If you mean a deal, I'm game for half a bull, and there's my word on it. But burn them duds, Johnny! I won't take the risk on 'em."

My master considered.

"Mayhap you're right," said he. "Call it done."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before the other had jerked the cloth from the table. And there underneath lay the dead stiff body of a little sooty boy. His hands were griped at his chest, as if in agony of its œdematous swelling, and his bared eyeballs and teeth were as white as porcelain.

I could not cry out, or do anything but stare in horror, while the gaunt man, with some show of persuasion, began to strip the little body of its coat and vest and trousers—all its poor harness. Then, in a sickness beyond words, I comprehended. I was to be made exchange, for these foul vestments, my own pretty silken toilet.

"Come along, Georgy," wheedled his late master. "You wouldn't be so unhandsome as to deny a lady, and she doing you honour to accept of them."

He rolled the body gently from side to side, so coaxingly forceful and intent, that someone, bursting in upon him at the moment, took him completely by surprise.

It was a wretchedly clad woman, with resinous blots of eyes in a hungry face, and a little black moustache over a toothless mouth—strange contrast!—that was never more still than a crab's.

"So he's dead, you dog!" she cried, seeming to feed on the words; "and you druv him to his death; and may God wither you!"

The bent man jumped, like a vulture, from the body, and hopped and dodged, keeping it between him and the woman.

"You took the odds!" he cried, coughing, and kneading his cracking knuckles together, "you took the odds, and you mustn't cry out like a woman if they gone agen ye. I did no more'n my duty, as the Lord hears me

"Both on us," said the woman. "Well, speak out!"

"He stuck," said the sweep. "He stuck beyond reason. It were a good ten-inch square, for all it were a draw-in bend. I were forced to smoke him; but his lungs were that crowded, there was no loosening the pore critter till they bust and let him down. He were a good boy, and worth a deal to me."

"That's true," put in my master. "A man, though he be a flue-faker, don't cut off his nose to spite his face, missus."

She made no answer, staring fixedly at the corpse.

"He were my seventh," she said. "He made no cry when you come and took him away from me—a yellow-haired devil. Did he cry for his mammy, chokin' up in the dark there?"

"No," said the man—"an unnat'ral son!"

She threw up her hands with a frightful gesture.

"I could have borne it if he had—I could have borne it, and cut my throat. What were you doing with him?"

The sweep hesitated; but my master took the word from him.

"It's a question of his slops, missus." (He jerked a thumb over his shoulder at me, where I stood in the background paralysed with terror.) "Half a bull or nothing, and you and him to share."

The woman put her arms akimbo.

"Ho, indeed!" she said. "And where does *he* come in?"

"It's my own smalls," swore the man, excited and truculent at once. "I won't bate an inch of 'em, if I'm to die for it."

They were facing each other across the body like

tom cats, when my master pulled his friend aside, and whispered in his ear.

"Amongst ladies and gentlemen," said he, and waited, smiling and oily, while the other fetched a black bottle from a cupboard. The woman visibly relaxed at the sight of this. Its owner uncorked it, and putting it to his mouth, gurgled, and smacked his black lips.

"The deal passes!" cried my master; and he snatched the bottle, and handed it to the woman with an ingratiatory smile.

It was the psychologic moment, which loosened and harmonised their tongues. They waxed confiding and genial. Presently the woman, commissioned politely to effect my transformation, swaggered across to me with devil-daring eyes, and began roughly to pull off my clothes.

"Damn you!" she said, with such a heat and violence of hate that my very sobs were withered in my throat. "Come up, you young limb! What the deuce! We'll cry quits for my Georgy when the black smoke finishes your ladyship."

She never had had a doubt of the meaning of my presence in that vile den, but my beauty and refinement and helplessness were only so many goads to her implacability. Her fingers were like rakes in my tender flesh. She would have torn me with her teeth, I believe, if any had been left to her. And I could only shrink and shiver under her hands, terrified if they wrung so much as a gasp from me.

When I was stripped, she seized a blunt dinner knife, and sawed off all my golden hair close to my head, a horrible experience. The tears gushed silent down my cheeks. They might have moved the heart of a wolf.

"There!" she said, when finished; "chuck us the duds!" and as she received them, scrubbed my face with the filthy tatters before she vested me in them.

I had hoped, perhaps, until thus hopelessly trans-

formed ; and then, at once, I hoped no more. *Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch' entrate*—I was behind the bars ; I wore the devil's livery. O, my Alcide ! Pity this poor little Proserpine so ravished from her Plains of Enna.

III

I ESCAPE

HAST thou the nerve to follow me, my friend? My martyrdom was severe, but, after all, brief. Comfort thyself with the thought of the brilliant moth which is to emerge from this sad chrysalis.

My master was an itinerant sweep. He jogged from town to village and from village to town in his little cart, an untaxed Bohemian, and carried me always with him. I had wild weepings at first, and frantic schemes of escape, and fits of sullen rebellion; but they were all persuaded out of me presently by his thick black hand. Then, as the past grew obscured behind me in ever-densifying clouds of soot, I came by degrees provisionally reconciled to my destiny, and even—canst thou believe it?—to some enjoyment of its compensations.

These were its changefulness, its irresponsibility, its little adventures, that always had our bodily solace for their end. We pilfered orchards, snatched an occasional fat duckling from a pond, smoked hives at night and carried away the dripping comb to eat under warm ricks in the moonlight. And I had little to complain of ill-treatment, except when engaged professionally. My master's ample receptivities laughed and grew fat on self-indulgence. Liquor made him, to my good fortune, beatifically helpless; rich meats, paternally benevolent, and even poetical. It was only in business that he chastised, with a large and incorruptible immorality.

I learned the jargon more readily than I did the practice of my abominable trade. My first ascent of a

chimney was a hideous experience,—an ascent into hell, reversing all geographical orthodoxy. But my particular devil was a Moloch, who would either be served by exaltation or vindicate his majesty in smoke and fire. He was diplomatic to put me through my first paces, so to speak, in a dismantled vicarage that was in preparation for a new tenant. He simply thrust an iron scraper into my hand, and, with the briefest directions, drove me up. I was refractory, of course; and at that, without wordy persuasion, he lit a brand of tow and applied it to my bare ankles. The pain made me scream and writhe, as he had philosophically counted upon its doing. Involuntarily I found myself ascending the flue, as an awn of barley travels up inside one's sleeve. The very ease of it made me rebel, and I stopped. Immediately the brand below, flaring at the end of a stick, was lifted to spur me. Frenzied and sobbing, I felt its hot rowel, and struggled on. The soot, with which the chimney was choked, began to fall upon me, half stifling, and filling my pockets. Then self-preservation, the great mother, recalled to me my directions. I looked up, and saw a far eye of light denoting freedom, and I began desperately to scrape clear my passage towards it, letting always the black raff descend between my knees before I rose to take its place. The eye enlarged, and with it grew the dawn of a strange new enthusiasm. I rose to it, like a fish to the angle, as my master had calculated I should. These fiends bait their hooks with heaven.

Suddenly, the last feet were conquered, and I emerged, and saw below me a beautiful village prospect of trees and homesteads.

Did I then sit there and weep? On the contrary, I was radiant. Account for it, thou *fripon*, as thou wilt. Thou knowest, Better the devil to applaud us than none at all. I swear to thee that, for the moment, I coveted nothing but my master's admiring praise. Breathless as I was, I bent and uttered down the chimney the shrill cry "All up!" as he had bidden me. A little

strained laugh came back, and, with an oath of distant approval, a command to descend. But at that, oddly enough, the horror came. I could not stomach the evil pit, with its reeling return into a night from which I had mounted to heaven. My knees trembled beneath me. I sat crying and shivering, while my master stormed thin gusty blasphemy up the flue. At length I remembered my duck-stone. It was in my trousers pocket, safe in its silver case, which, having dropped in the cart, I had found again to my delight lying undiscovered amongst the soot bags. I took it out, let myself down gingerly to the arm-pits, clutched it tightly in my hand, and sniffed, but not vigorously. I awoke to find myself sitting on the hearth, and smiling foolishly into the frightened face of my master. He recovered himself at the moment I did, and was the implacable martinet again and at once.

"Why, you cust little back-slummer!" he said, "to let loose and think to take a chalk of me like that! I'll larn your nerves!"

And he pulled me to my feet, with his hand raised, but thought better of it, and gave me another chance. Chimney after chimney I must mount, till, fagged and heart-broken, I stood rebellious against his extremest persuasion, and he was obliged, with at least a few healing words of commendation, to postpone the finish of his job.

So began this terror of my new life, and so fortunately ended within a period that was not stretched beyond my endurance.

In this phase of it, after the first, there were no compensations, but only degrees of misery. If my master had ever thought to make capital out of my restoration, he soon abandoned the idea as impracticable, and devoted all his persuasion to turning me, after the inhuman methods of his class, to his best profit. Once I stuck tight in one of those clogged "draw-in bends" which had been fatal to my predecessor. I could move no way, and in my struggles, a little crossed stay of iron,

fixed in the chimney, so pressed upon my breast as almost to stop my heart. I was in a dreadful condition of terror and suffering, and in the midst he lit some damp straw on the hearth to smoke me down. The fumes took away my senses, and so, perhaps flattening the resistance of my lungs, released me. But I was in a sort of conscious delirium for days afterwards. Sometimes, where he had got the worst of a housewife's bargaining, he would shout to me, working two-thirds up, "Pike the lew, boy!" which, in sweep's jargon, meant, Leave the job unfinished, to spite the old slut! And then I would descend at once. Sometimes, where a cluster of flues ran into one shaft, I would come down into the wrong room, causing consternation amongst its inmates. But, through all, the idea of escape was very early a dead passion in me, so utterly in soot and sexlessness was I lost to any sense of self-identity.

So, always homeless, always enslaved, always wandering, I was one day, some nine months after my abduction, come with my master into the neighbourhood of Streatham, which is a little rural suburb of London, reclaimed, with other contiguous hamlets, from the thick woods and gipsy-haunted commons of that part of the country. For some days past we had moved, unhurriedly as was our wont, through an atmosphere charged with a curious nervous excitement. Housewives, avoiding contact with us, as with possibly compromising emissaries of ill-omen, had vanished into their cottages as we came near; tavern cronies, grouped at tap-doors, were to be seen looking citywards, until dark, tramping up the long white roads, drove them within with unreasonable frights of shapeless things approaching. Then, sure enough, the night horizon grew patched with flaring cressets, and we learned that London was in the hands of a No-Popery mob.

Its area of destruction spreading like an unchecked ink-blot, and we moving to meet it, brought us presently involved in the fringe of the disorder. Protestant Dulwich had sent its contingent to help petition Parliament

against the legalising of the poor harried Catholics, and had got its warrant, as it chose to consider, for an anti-Romish crusade. And for that, whether right or wrong, I, at least, owe it gratitude.

We were rolling one afternoon along a certain Knight's Hill or road which skirted a stretch of common, when we came upon a great inn, called The Horns, where was a considerable concourse of people assembled, all in blue cockades, and buzzing like a hive about to swarm. The word most in the mouths of this druff was Pope, which at first we took to mean the Vicar of Rome, but soon understood for the name of a young Jesuit who was lately come as chaplain to a Catholic family of the neighbourhood. Now, such insolent defiance of the penal laws was not to be tolerated, and so the loyal Protestant burghers of Dulwich were going, with no disrespect to the family, to cast down its graven images, and hang up its chaplain for a scarecrow to all propagandists who should venture out of the Holy See into our tight little island. And here they were gathered to organise themselves, the process taking good account of malt liquors; and hence, when they moved off, we, to cut the story short, accompanied them walking, foreseeing some prospect of "swag" in the crusade.

Going in a pretty compact body, with a great deal of howling and hymning, such as that with which all conscripts, either of the cross or guillotine, are accustomed to stimulate one another's courage and vanity, we crossed a Croksted Lane, and again a sweep of wild heath, that spread towards the dense forests called Northwood, which fill all that shallow valley from Sydenham Wells on the north to Penge Common on the south. And presently coming to the trees, and entering a wide, elegant clearing amidst them, where the woods were banked behind, and the ground dropped towards us in terraces, on the highest we saw the house standing, a great sunny block of brick and stone, but shuttered now, and apparently lifeless.

The mob at first knocked on the door with a diffidence

inspired of its varnished and portly exclusiveness; but, provoking no response, presently grew bolder and more clamorous. Still, I believe, its fervour would ultimately have wasted itself on this inflexible barrier, had not my master, with some disgusted expressions of contempt, come to the front and taunted it on to a violence the more vicious because it was shamefaced. Under his stimulus, then, the panels were beginning to crack, when in a moment the bolts flew, and there stood in the opening a little sinister fellow in grey, who asked us, curt and ironic, our business.

All but my master fell back before him, though there were some broken cries touching the Scarlet Woman, which the sweep took up.

The little man wrinkled his little acrid nose. He was nobody, it turned out, but the Scotch steward, holding staunch to his post; but he was cut and coloured like steel.

"D'ye ask here for your doxy?" he said. "Go back, man, and look where you left her in the tavern."

The sweep, only half understanding, spat out a mouthful of oaths.

"We want that there Pope!" he roared. "Bring us to the black-devil, you."

"After you, sir," answered the other politely.

My master, looking horribly ugly, repeated his demand.

"Well," said the steward, "this is fair humours, Newcastle asking for coals!"

The words were hardly out of him, when my master smote him down, and pushed into the house. He gave a little quiver, like unstrung wire, and lay senseless, the red running from his nostrils.

Mon chéri, hast thou ever seen a pack of mongrels snarl aloof, fearful and agitated, about a dog-fight, and in a moment break in with coward teeth upon the conquered? So over the body of the steward trampled this rabble, blooded now at another's expense, and reckless in its consciousness of self-irresponsibility. They

had found a champion to take the onus of this, and all worse that might happen, off their shoulders.

But they were destined to discover no further chestnuts for their catspaw. The Jesuit had fled, it appeared, with the rest of the family ; and so they must content themselves with wrecking the private chapel, where the household was wont to practise its treasonable rites.

Now, my master, who was eager after spoil, sweating and toiling in the thick of the press, left me unguardedly to my own devices ; and suddenly I found myself quite alone in a closet hung with vestments, where there was a fireplace with an open bricked hearth, having no signs of usage, which immediately, from habit, caught my attention. And straight, at last, God, pitiful to His poor little derelict, touched the cross on my breast, and quickened inspiration in that where I had supposed all was dead. I slid into the chimney, and went up, up, like an eel in a well rising for air. The sounds of destruction grew attenuated beneath me ; I smelt life and freedom, and swarmed faster in my agony to attain them. The chimney, clean as at its building, let down no token of my passage by it, and in a few moments I emerged from the summit, and, tumbling into the cleft of a long double roof—found myself face to face with a man who was there before me.

IV

I FALL INTO THE HANDS OF A COLLECTOR

AT least I call him a man ; but O, my Alcide, he was a marionnette ! His joints creaked. All the bran in his body seemed to have been shaken down into his calves. His hat supported itself on his ears and the top of his coat collar. His sleeves were sacks. His nose was nothing but a wen, and being no better adapted to the burden of some enormous spectacles he wore, had led his fingers to an incessant trick of adjusting those in their place. He carried under his arm an immense folio, with which, as I appeared, he aimed an agitated blow at me, only to miss and fall forward on his face on the roof.

I instantly dodged past him, and stood panting while he collected himself. His glasses, without which he was helpless, had flown off, and I saw his eyes, which before had seemed to fill the whole field of the great lenses, mere swollen slits, like a pig's. He groped about in the utmost consternation as he knelt, pawing the tiles for his lost property.

"Who are you ? Wait ! I'll be with you," he ejaculated excitedly, as his bony hands swept the roof.

I backed out of their reach without replying.

At last he found what he sought, and fitting the rims to his nose, rose to his feet and stared at me.

"Hey, what !" he said—"a sweep ! Well !"—and blew out a rumbling grunt, which he checked suddenly, as if he had turned a cock on it.

A moment after, he put his hand into his pocket, and fetching out a dirty fragment of biscuit, held it to me

persuasively, as one might lure a colt. Seeing, however, that I still held away from him, he threw the biscuit down in a pet, and stood to canvass me in a baleful manner.

"What do you want?" he snapped out suddenly. "How did you find your way here?"

Still with my eyes on him, I answered, in a husky whisper—

"Don't you know? Up the closet chimney."

"Ay," he said, dropping his own voice in tacit response to the warning in mine, "but not to sweep it?"

"No," I said; "to escape by it."

His hand went up to his glasses. He glared at me through their restored focus.

Watchful of him, lest, before I could explain, he should silence me provisionally with some stunning blow, I ventured to approach him a little nearer.

"There's killing," I whispered, "going on down there—a poor old man in a grey coat."

He started violently, and pulling his jaw down, uttered a sort of mechanical crow, and let it go again.

"Grey!" he muttered. "It's the steward, then. He didn't give *me* away, did he?"

I shook my head dumbly. He was readjusting his glasses to meet the answer.

"Ay," he gulped, swallowing with relief, "poor Mackenzie! And to think that for all his loyalty he must burn!"

I whispered, "Why must he?"

"Because," he said, "he wasn't of the faith."

This uncouth creature was getting horrible to me. I suppose he read my repulsion in my face, for his own suddenly grew agitated and menacing.

"Are you thinking of betraying me?" he said.

I retreated before him, working my foolish young arms.

"Keep away!" I cried; "I don't even know who you are."

"O!" he said, and stopped, and was at his spectacles again. Then suddenly he held up his hand.

"Hark!" he said.

I listened. Far and faint below, through the hubbub of destruction came wafted at intervals the name of the chaplain—Pope—the cynosure of all this iconoclastic zeal.

"Yes, it's you they want," I said.

"And you," he retorted fiercely, "are pointing the way, you little"—

"It's a lie!" I cried vehemently. "I came up here to escape from them, like you."

He looked at me doubtfully.

"You said you didn't know who I was."

"No more I did," I protested, "till you told me."

"I told you!" he cried. "Humph!" And he glared at me sourly. "Sit down, then," he said, "and hold your tongue till I speak to you again."

It was the wise policy, certainly. He squatted himself between me and the chimney, and we dwelt in silence, while the mob wreaked its blind vengeance below. I was in a dreadful fright all the time. Every moment I expected to hear my master's voice boom up the flue by way of which I had climbed; and, desperate as I was, I devised the naughty expedient to curry favour, if necessary, by claiming the credit of having run this fugitive to bay. It was a base thought, perhaps, though natural under the stress of the occasion. Chiefly, however, I regret it because it was uncalled for, and it is aggravating to burden one's conscience with unprofitable frailties. The monster I had run from was never, in point of fact, to cross my path again. Probably, thinking I had fled from the house, he went hunting counter, and so put ever a wider interval between us.

It was not, after all, so very long before the racket of despoliation down below died away, and we heard the mob clatter from the house, and go streaming and singing across the common in its retreat. I believe that, either realising how in my master it had evoked a demon to

its own legal discomfiture, or perhaps frightened by the bugbear of some reported troop of militia assembling in the neighbourhood, it was suddenly decided to temper Protestantism with prudence, and so dissipating itself with great speed and piety, left the building to a solitude more dense by contrast than before.

It was not, however, until every whisper and echo had long ceased that I durst let myself be persuaded of the reality of my reprieve; and when at last I did, the joy that grew minutely in my heart came near to upsetting my reason.

My excitement hungered for something on which to flesh itself. I rose and went up and down, quickly and softly, in the space left me, seeking the means to some larger action. Then I saw the great folio lying discarded on the roof where the chaplain had dropped it, and all of a sudden felt itching to know what it could contain to tempt this man to burden himself with its care in so anxious a situation.

He sat with his face in his hands—or cuffs, rather. He appeared to be in a sort of uncouth trance. I stole very noiselessly by him, and, unobserved as I supposed, had actually lifted the book, when he started awake in a moment.

“Hey!” he cried. “That’s mine!”

“I was going to bring it to you,” I said.

He scuttled towards me on his hands and toes, and snatching the book from me, squatted down, hugging it, and glaring at me in a sort of dumb malevolence.

I had no retort for such rudeness. I stood crimsoning under my black a moment, then, in default of a better answer, began to cry.

He was not the least moved, the ill-conditioned boor, but he was disturbed by the noise.

“Ur-rh!” he bullied. “That’ll do. Do you hear?”

Indignation gave me decision. I turned my back on him.

“Where are you going?” he cried.

I stalked on without a word.

"No, you don't!" he said, scrambling up; and he followed and caught hold of my jacket.

"Let me go!" I cried, struggling. "My master will be looking for me."

"O!" he said, quite suddenly agitated. "Come here and I'll show you a picture."

I let myself be drawn reluctant.

"Is it of the Scarlet Woman?" I said.

He started, and roared, "The Scarlet—!" then, conscious of his mistake, dropped his voice to a panic whisper.

"There's no such moth," said he. "If you mean *heraclia dominula*, the scarlet tiger, come and I'll show you one."

He persuaded me to sit by him on the roof slope, and gingerly opened the book away from me.

"Don't touch," he said. "It's called *Fasti Sanctorum Naturæ Cultoribus Proprii*."

"Is that Latin?" I asked.

"Yes," he growled; but he looked at me rather curiously. "It means The Naturalist's Calendar of the Saints. How did you know?"

"O, I know," I said.

He turned some leaves, while scanning me covertly and sourly; and I exclaimed becomingly over their contents. On each was a picture of a saint, hastily illuminated, and of many insects most beautifully coloured after nature. The saints, it is true, were pigmies, and the moths life size; but it was through the former that this uncivilised Churchman justified himself in a secular hobby. He was, as I came to learn presently, a crazy collector of the small game of fields and hedges, and had only drifted into the Church after a particularly fine specimen of the Painted Lady, or some such immoral creature.

I tried to appreciate in order to conciliate him; but I could see that my flattery was not expert, or perhaps fulsome enough for his taste. Presently, on the score that my mere neighbourhood threatened the lustre of

his illuminations, he shut the book, and placed it discontentedly by his side.

"Did you do it all by yourself?" I asked.

"Ay," he grunted.

"And why did you bring it up here, when"—

He smacked his great hand on his knee, interrupting me—

"If you haven't the intelligence to see—sooner part with my blood to those Vandals! There; let the book alone, and tell me what brought you here."

"I've said already—I was escaping from my master."

"A master sweep?"

"Yes."

"Now," he said, "how did you know this was Latin?"

I hung my head.

"Come," he threatened, "you'd best tell me."

I was considering what I should do. I reddened excited under my mask, and rose to my feet again. After all these months of obliteration, a wonderful thought was beginning to dawn in me—the thought of my sex as a possible factor in my redemption. For how long, my dear friend, had I not lost the art to play it for the value of so much as a sugar-plum? And what was there now to prevent me from reassuming that charming confidence in men which so disarms them? Alas! it was a vain recovery here—a waste of art on a material no more responsive to it than a pulpit hassock.

"How did you know?" he repeated angrily.

"Because," I whispered, blushing, and lingering over the sensation I felt I was about to produce—"because—Father—I am a little daughter of the Church."

He had been gnawing his knuckles, as he bent his morose brows on me; and at my words stopped suddenly, his great teeth bared, like a dog looking up from a bone.

"I am the child of a great gentleman. I was stolen from my parents," I said, and clasped my hands to him.

"I am not a boy at all, but a girl."

He leapt up as if I had struck him.

"How dare you!" he shouted; then, choking, in another hoarse reaction to panic, "How dare you try to impose upon me!"

"I'm not!" I cried, in a childish fury of chagrin over his insensibility. "It's true, every word. My mother was a Sister of les Madelonnettes, and I was stolen from her, and I want to be sent back."

I did not in truth, save in so far as that way only lay my chance of restoration to my darling father. But the point was inessential.

The priest's eyes, dilated monstrosities, devoured me through their lenses.

"Les Madelonnettes—the Magdalens!" he muttered, amazed and frowning. His hand, caressing his chin, grated on the stubble of it. "Come," he said brutally, "I'm an old bird to be caught by chaff. Confess to me, if you're a Catholic, you wretched little sinner."

I wanted nothing better. This sacrament of penance must convince and win him. In a moment my young elastic soul had leapt the dark interlude which divided me from my past, and my little feet were tripping once more in fancy down the royal prince's table. I fell on my knees.

"Say your Confiteor," he commanded harshly.

I repeated it without a mistake.

"Humph!" said he. "What are you waiting for?"

I told him my whole story. He listened to it, after the first, abstractedly, with one eye caressing his abominable book. At the end he gave me absolution, canvassing me distastefully as he pondered the penance. Presently he spoke.

"I order you," he said, "twenty Ave Marias, and to return to your master."

I jumped to my feet.

"My master—the sweep!" I cried.

"Certainly," he replied stubbornly. "You were obviously the foundling of Providence, which has elected this honest tradesman to be your foster-father."

"But, my mother?" I choked.

"It is her judgment," he said, "to remain and mingle her weeping with the ashes of this sacrifice, in the hospital of which her crimes have made her an inmate."

He had listened with his elbows, as I supposed. I recognised the hopelessness of my task.

"Very well," I said. "I daresay he has finished with the steward by now. I will go and tell him what you say"—and I made for the chimney.

He was after me in a moment, at a gallop.

"Stop!" he cried. "What do you mean? That your master was one of this rabble?"

"One? The worst of them all," I answered. "It was he knocked down the poor grey gentleman; and the last I heard of him was crying for you."

He released me, to throw up his hands.

"The intolerance of these heretics!" he cried. "Stop! Don't go. I withdraw my pronouncement. You shall name your own penance."

I breathed quickly, standing before him.

"Father, that is soon done. I will go with you."

"With me—with me?" he complained, stamping distracted. "Where to?"

"Anywhere from here," I pleaded. "You can't stop. The whole country's up, and a second time, if they come, you'll be caught."

Snorting with agitation, he took off his spectacles to wipe them.

"It's quite impossible," he said. "I know of only one asylum beyond, and that"—

With a quick little snatch I ravished the glasses from his hand, and, running away with them, hid behind a chimney. For a minute or two he raved round, stumbling, and grabbing at the air, and finally tripped over his book and subsided, quite prostrate, upon the roof.

"Little sweep!" he panted, in a trembling voice. "My daughter—child of Magdalen—where are you?"

I held my breath; and he went on, in broken sentences—

“Come back—give me my glasses—where are you?—I believe all you say—What! will you give me up, and the Calendar unfinished?”

Then, as I still did not answer, “Holy saints! The little devil has hobbled me, and I shall be caught and martyred.”—A longish pause—“*In manus tuas, Domine, com*— I wonder if in Paradise—the scarce copper—h’m!”

He began to gnaw his knuckles, with a sort of pleased abstraction over the thought. It would never do. I came out of my hiding.

“Will you take me with you?” I repeated.

“O, it’s you?” he cried, with a start. “Where are my glasses?”

“In my hand.”

“Will you return them to me?”

“Will you let me go with you?”

“Scandalous!”

“I will carry the book.”

“Pooh!”

“I will walk behind.”

“Pish!”

“If anything happens to me, then”—

“Fah!” he interposed; and then added, “What could happen to you?”

“Do you suppose I shall stay in these clothes?” I said. “I shall return to be a girl; and what am I to do then, without someone to protect and help me back to my parents?”

“That’s nothing to me,” he said.

“Good-bye,” said I.

He scrambled to his feet with a roar: “Give me back my glasses!”

I stood quite still, making no sound. He thought I had really gone this time, and began taking little strides hither and thither, and throwing his arms about. Suddenly he stopped, sweating with agitation.

"Are you there?" he said.

I did not answer. He hopped from leg to leg, pulling with one hand at the other, as if at a tight glove.

"Child!" he cried, "you're a good child—a perfect little sweep. You shall come—do you hear?—if we ever get off this roof. We'll escape by the woods—nobody will see us there together—and I can catch some arguses (*lasiommata aegeria*) that will be in season."

V

I AM CARRIED AWAY AS A SPECIMEN

THE very rudeness of the creature nominated by Fate to be my warden gave me a feeling of confidence. Here was a shepherd's dog ugly enough to frighten away the wolf himself, should he cross us in the shape of my master. I thrilled to have secured his promise, which, for all his boorishness, and perhaps because of it, I had faith in. The dark pit was already half bridged in my foolish young imagination, and I dreamed of alighting on the farther side—to what? Not, indeed, to the old melancholy life of the cottage near the Steine. For all my sad experience, I never entertained that prospect for one moment. I was but now in my eleventh year, yet some instinct informed me that the dead—amongst whom, surely, I must be written—should not return if they would avoid the mortification of home truths; that broken threads cannot be made one again, and leave no scar. Perhaps the spirit of vagabondage even had entered a little into my blood. In any case, it was the breezy security of my father's, not my mother's, protection to which I hurried in thought, with this reverent cur for escort.

As for him, accounting for his presence on the roof, he growled out to me once after this, in order to still my inquisitive importunity, while I still held the spectacles in pledge, that he had indeed taken the alarm that morning, with the rest of the family to whom he was spiritual director; but that, remembering his book left behind, he had insisted upon quitting the general flight and returning for it—with what awkward results for the

steward had appeared, though, as a fact, I believe the poor man recovered later. Now, I was to understand, he had the intention, if he could make good his escape, to seek asylum, while the storm blew over, with a lady, a co-religionist and connection of his patrons, who lived distant a two days' journey on foot. And so, having grudgingly informed me, he subsided into his unsavoury self, and would speak no more.

I did not much care, once being put in possession of the facts and the chances they afforded me. No one, it was evident, guessed at our retreat; and, for the rest, I was content to bide my time, and the opportunity I foresaw of impressing even this dull animal with a revelation of the pretty romance he had undertaken to squire.

Evening fell, and we were still sitting there. Not a footstep sounded in the house beneath us; not a voice but the birds' came from the garden. Presently, emboldened by the quiet, I went softly climbing and investigating, finding the trap-door by way of which the chaplain had ascended, and peeping between the gables and over the roof ridges. So far as I could see, nothing human was stirring in all the placid demesne. The sundial on the lawn, the arbour in the corner, the brook embroidering the low trees, like a ribbon run through lace, were things inanimate in a painted picture. But there was something in their voiceless watchfulness that made me long to open the door, as it were, and run into the air. I was not born, like my mother, for cloisteral seclusions.

I was passing my companion once soft-footed, when he startled me by demanding, suddenly and savagely, "What's your name?"

"Diana, please," I answered, in a flutter.

"*Diana—Please!*" he protested crossly. "Fah! Diana Please don't please"—and he subsided into himself again.

But he had christened me. I had gone lacking nothing but a name of my own hitherto and here was

one given me, apt and pat. From that moment I became Diana Please.

The very sense of its possession made me forward.

"Aren't we safe now?" I said, "or are you going to stop here all night?"

He looked up at me hurriedly, and, scowling, motioned me away from him. Then, without a word, he snatched his book, rose, and striding to the trap-door, began to descend. I followed him closely. The way led by a flight of steps in the walls to a cupboard under the main stairs where they rose from the hall. We emerged from darkness into a wide echoing twilight. For the first time the thought of my master secreted somewhere, watchful and waiting for me, sent my spirits reeling. I slunk against the wall.

"Where was it?" demanded my companion brusquely.

I stared at him. He stamped his foot, so that the noise resounded horribly through the empty house.

"The steward!" he cried. "Where did they leave him?"

"By the door," I whispered, trembling—"out there."

It was still ajar. He hurried to it, looked out, went out, returned after a minute or two, and slammed the oak thunderously.

"There are trails of blood down the steps. He has been removed, or has removed himself," he said, and began immediately to ascend the stairs.

"O, where are you going?" I cried fearfully.

"To bed," he snapped.

"To bed!"

I clung to his coat-tails. There was a sort of nightmare struggle between us, up as far as the first landing. There he rent himself away, and, leaving me sprawling, banged and locked himself into a room. I crouched on the mat outside, sobbing and imploring. "What am I to do? Where am I to go?"

He answered not a word to my pleading. Presently I heard him snoring, and—would you believe it?—the gross carnival of sound was heavenly music in my ears.

In all that vast loneliness it was my only human stay and comfort. O, my Alcide! To think of thy Diane owing her reason to the grunting of a hog.

It was a terrible night. I dared not move—scarcely breathe. But fear and exhaustion at last overcame me, and I slept.

I awoke to sweet, soundless daylight. The look and smell of sunshine restored me in a moment to myself. I had not been disturbed. The house was utterly abandoned. I arose, resolved at once to put into effect the plan I had formed. A little memory of something I had noticed yesterday was urging me. I fled softly upstairs. Signs of the raid met me at every turn: broken crucifixes, torn vestments, scattered Hosts—up and down they lay, trodden into dirty rubbish by the swarming footsteps. There had been, I believe, no secular looting, unless, as was probable, by my master, who would be sure, on that account, to have withdrawn himself remote from consequences. I had nothing to fear from him. I looked for a room where I had seen some children's clothes scattered, and finding it still undisturbed, quickly selected from among the litter the simplest outfit I could adapt in mind to my figure.

A common watch lay ticking on a table. I examined it—scarce five o'clock—lingered, hesitated, and left it where it was. I had not yet come to thief, even had it been less bulky for my juvenile fob. Hastily I snatched soap and towels from a washing-stand, and holding the clothes so as not to soil them against my own, stole out. There was not water enough in all the house for my cleansing. My spirit rushed to the little river I had seen gleaming under the trees.

At the back of the hall I found a low window, unlatched it, and dropped into the garden. A light fog was spread abroad, which, dripping from the trees, alarmed me with a thought of unseen things moving near. But presently a bird piped close above my head, with a note of reassurance, and I slipped on and made my

way stealthily towards the river until I heard it gurgling ; and in a moment later I came upon it.

There, with only the wild things in the grass to scare my modesty, I made my bath. The ecstasy of it, as all that foul husk slipped off, and was carried from me down the stream ! The joy to recover my near-forgotten self, the thing of pink and pearl, from its long mourning ! The wonder, and the strangeness of that reincarnation to a maturer estate ! I was not, like the Sleeping Beauty, to renew my old, but to awake to a newer self—a different from the Diana from whom I had departed nine months before. It seemed incredible ; and still when I was washed as white as a lamb, I must sluice, and relather, and sluice again, to convince myself that no stain of my horrible livery remained. Then, at last, I came out, and dried and dressed myself hurriedly ; and so, being secure, sat awhile on the bank to let my hair sun. It had never been but roughly clipped since that first cruel shearing, and now was down to my collar, thick and golden. I could see it in the water glass, when I bent over, reflected like a dim glory, and I nodded and laughed to the picture in my delight, and was only sorry presently to bind it about gipsy fashion with the silk handkerchief I had brought down with me for the purpose. But time was moving, and so must I be. I rose, and returned to the house.

I heard a shuffling on the stairs as I re-entered by the window, and in a moment, tripping lightly, came upon Father Pope descending. He had his great book under his arm, and he tiptoed with a sort of scared effort to hush the creaking of his tell-tale shoes. He gave a guilty start on seeing me standing smiling before him, and stumbled and caught himself erect by the banisters, frowning at me.

I did not speak. I stood dumbly to let him canvass the transformation ; but the creature had no nerve of sentiment in all his dull anatomy.

“What do you want ?” he said ; “who are you ?”

I could see he only fenced with the truth to

recover himself. I dropped him a pretty little curtsey.

"Diana, please," I said.

I was in trepidation that he would deny me, as I was convinced he had designed to give me the slip; and, though for policy's sake I must propitiate him, I hated the creature for his treachery. But, despite his being a Jesuit, he was too crude a wit for the double part.

"Humph!" he growled. "I was wondering what had become of you,"—which, no doubt, was true enough.

He glowered at me dislikingly; then bidding me wait for him, stalked off into the gloom of passages, from which he presently re-emerged with a bagful of bread and biscuit ends which he had collected.

"I have no money," he said. "You must manage with your share of these or nothing. If you look for better, it must be out of my company."

"What does for you, will do for me, Father," I said meekly; but nothing would disarm his churlishness.

"That's a matter of opinion," said he. "I could do very well without you, to begin with."

I dropped my eyes.

"Now, then, bestir yourself," he bullied. "If you're to come at all, come before the world's awake."

He strode off, and I followed, through shuttered glooms, and along silent corridors to a distant part of the building, emerging from a door in which we found ourselves in a close shrubbery-walk going up towards woods. Very soon the comforting screen of trees was about us, and the peril of watchful enemies surpassed. We pushed on without rest or pause. My spirit and my feet danced together. It was all so free and fragrant, and the rapture of my new emancipation was like a second sight. Fays and sweet things seemed to melt before me round green corners, or overhead among the branches, leaving a scent of the unknown world in their footsteps. I sang low, I laughed to the birds, I seemed incapable of weariness. And,

indeed, my late training served me in good stead, for this clerical Caliban had no mercy on my tender limbs. He desired only the least excuse to shake me off, and I would not gratify him with one.

All day he led me south by wood and common, avoiding the living places where men were like to be alert on the new Crusade. We hardly exchanged a word, as he swung on with the gait of a camel; but in the end it was he who succumbed first. The weight of his great folio crushed him—that is the truth. He called a halt in an unfrequented copse, and flung himself exhausted on the grass.

“Go, find yourself a lodging,” he said. “I will sleep here.”

I did not dare cross him. I crept away; but only so far as a low thorn tree, mounting into which I could easily hold him in view. But I need not have feared. The poor wretch was sunk in fatigue, and incapable of further effort. He had an odious night, I am sure, while I, from my late habits, slept as securely as in an arm-chair.

Early next morning we were afoot again. My companion, mouldy-cheeked and limping, greeted me with a scowl.

“What have I not suffered of humiliation as a priest,” he said, “to have thee breathing in the same wood!”

The world must have been an insufficient dormitory to this misogynist.

At noon, having wandered for hours through forest so green, so profound, that its deer-haunted vistas seemed the very byways to the infinite, we came out suddenly, when half faint with toil and hunger, upon the foot of a low hill, on whose summit was a queer octagonal stone tower, crowned with a dome like a pepper-box. My companion sputtered anathema upon seeing it, and stood stock still.

“What is it, Father?” I whispered, creeping up to him.

“We’ve overshot the mark, that’s all,” he growled,

conceding a point to civility. "Here's Shole beyond; and I aimed at no farther than Wellcot-Herring. Well, we must go over as the shortest way," and he began to mount the slope.

I followed him, emboldened to ask, "What's this we're coming to?"

"Rupert's Folly," he answered viciously. "Old Lousy's spy-house."

"What's he?" I asked.

He gave a rude laugh.

"He's an itch on the skin of my lord that he can't scratch away;" and, with these coarse, enigmatic words, he motioned me to fall behind.

The tower sprouted clean from the grass. Reaching and skirting it, I had occasion barely to notice a figure seated under a low door against its farther angle, before the liveliest prospect below engaged all my attention. The hill went down on this side into a wide valley, in the midst of whose trees and pastures, dominating a tiny village with forge and tavern, stood a great old house of grey stone. On the green before, as we could see, was a merry-making: sports, and dancing, and long tables spread, and a vast broaching of casks. And the villagers in their ribbons were all there, so that my eyes and my heart danced to see them.

But my companion stood looking down with a most venomous expression.

"Fah! A nest of heretics!" he muttered. "What golden calf are they met to worship?"

"The red herring's spawn, good sir," said the voice of the creature behind us. I turned and stared at him for the first time. He sat sucking at a long pipe at the open door of the tower—the filthiest little scrub you could imagine. His face was like old crumpled parchment, his crafty eyes floated in rheum, and he scratched a dusty tag of beard down upon his breast as he leered at us.

"What! Lousy John," said the priest. "Is it our heir of all the Herrings come of age?"

"Ay," said the old wretch. "Nephew Salted. You know him? Ay, ay. You should be the man Pope, of course, by your rudeness? Go down to your whore of Babylon, sir. She mingles with yonder company."

"You'd have me into the range of your burning-glass, hey?" said the priest, with a snort between laughter and contempt.

The other smoked on unperturbed.

"All in good time, priest," he said. "I'm not for anticipatin' the devil. Is that his scriptures you're a-carryin' to propagate?"

My companion uttered a furious exclamation, and, hugging his book, shuffled out of range. Most like a woman, he could not bear to have his spiteful humour returned upon him.

I understood nothing of all this, of course, and was standing bewildered, when the old obscenity beckoned me.

"See," he said, taking his pipe from his mouth and pointing with the scarlet tongue of it: "a beautiful landscape, ain't it?"

"Yes," I faltered.

"Ah!" said he. 'I'll tell you—just you, mind. I don't take a-many into my confidence. It's the beauty of pain, child; a local inflammation in the system."

I murmured something, and he chuckled.

"They call this tower 'Rupert's Folly,'" he said privately; "and I laugh, settin' up here in my shell. D'ye think they'd laugh too, if they guessed where the smut came from that blasted of their crops?"

"From you?" I whispered.

He bent over, and pointed upwards. For the first time I noticed that the muzzle of a telescope projected from the little dome on the roof. While I was gazing, I suddenly felt my wrist in the clutch of his apish claw.

"Hush!" he said. "It's there I gathers my star-powder, and discharges it where I will. I'm Briareus,

the last of the Uranids, left behind to rack the world to all eternity for its presumption."

He let me go, squinting and nodding at me. I backed from him in horror. Nothing was plain to me but that here was one of those astrologic demons who delight to bring heaven close that they may measure our remoteness from it, and to cast away poor souls amidst the eternal silences. That he seemed to rave was nothing. Such inhumanity is in itself a madness.

"Ay," he chuckled, hugging himself in a secret way, "you didn't expect that, did you? You must be a god to lust in pain. Why, lord, child! the earth would be drab all over but for its galls and breakings. See where I've set a withered crop among thē green; see where I've teased the soil to scarlet—a blazing core of fever. I know the World, the wanton. So long as she can cover her cancer with a ribbon, she'll smile. By and by I shall set a spark to the west, and burn up the day's rubbish. Look when the sun drops, and you'll see it a little point of white, and afterwards a bonfire."

I backed still farther.

"Lord!" he cried, doubling with laughter, "what headaches I've projected into their beer-barrels down there! What poison laid on the lasses' lips! I shall have some fine incense of sufferin' risin' to me to-morrow! What, you're goin', are you? Down into the fire, hey? A pretty little faggot to mend its blazin'!" And he kneaded his hands rapturously between his knees.

I saw the priest had disappeared over the crest, and, half crying, pursued him. He turned on me angrily as I came up.

"Now," said he, adjusting his spectacles to glare through them, "if that old carrion speaks truth, I come to an end with you." He gripped my shoulder. "Hold your tongue, d'you hear? Not a word of us till we find out how the land lies."

He dropped his hold, on a sudden thought, to my elbow, and, with a muttered menace, marched me down the hill.

At the bottom, in a little lane, with hedges to screen it from the view beyond, we came unexpectedly upon a lady gathering wild flowers. She started violently upon observing my companion, and dropped her nosegay. He accosted her, with a manner of gruff civility, and here it was somehow that, as they broke into talk of an urgent nature, we got separated.

VI

I AM "PINNED OUT"

THE festivities were to celebrate the majority of the Viscount Salted, only son to Hardrough, fourth Earl of Herring, Baron Rowe of Shole and Wellcot-Herring, Warden of the Cinque Ports, and official Verderer of the Forest of Down. The Lady Sophia Rowe, aunt to the young gentleman, had driven over from Wellcot—her estate in tail female, and distant from Shole by road seven miles—to lend her saintly countenance to the gathering, and it was she whom Father Pope, steering his course erroneously for Shole instead of Wellcot-Herring, had fortuitously encountered culling wild flowers in her brother's lordlier demesne.

The Lady Sophia was, unlike her orthodox kinsman, a convert to the Catholic from the Established Church, and within her limits, and because of them, a zealous fanatic. In her one saw acutely demonstrated the denaturalising power of creed. Gentle as a dove by temperament, there was no crime but self-destruction which she would not have gloried in to justify hers. She would have thought the world well lost to save her own soul, colourless as that dear little article was. Though she was modesty incarnate, her self-importance in this respect was amazing. She schemed through all the virtues for the apotheosis of Lady Sophia, and she called her scheming the vindication of truth, which she held to be a Romish monopoly. She would have made me a nun, as part of it, and taken all the credit with Heaven. I can hardly regret that she was foiled. I

love truth as well as any woman; only, being a woman, *à contre-cœur*, and not a saint, for me it must be coloured, and in the newest shades. To ask me to love it for its own sake is to ask me to be a dowd; and, for all my respect for Lady Sophia, I have never fancied a heaven of dowds.

When we alighted on her, she was by great good chance withdrawn from her company, and communing with Nature for relaxation. Flowers, to her, were sanctified of the altar, so bringing her faith and her inclinations into line. She was terribly agitated over her encounter with Father Pope, whom she knew, and over his peril, which she exaggerated. The shock of intolerance was hardly extended to Shole; but she had heard, by private despatch, of her Dulwich kinsfolk's flight, and of the chaplain's eccentric desertion, and all the day had tormented herself with fears of the fate which he had invited to befall him. Now, while they were engaged in earnest discussion, eschewing for the moment all thought of me, I was driven by curiosity to steal down the lane, till, through a gap in the hedge, I was able to observe at close hand the lively scene that was enacting on the green below.

It had certainly looked prettier from the hill. I saw links of red-faced oafs sway roaring across the turf, and whip themselves in mere drunken impulse about any mock-bashful hoyden who stood, feigning unconsciousness, in their path. I saw blowzed, over-fed women, dragging squalling babies, struggle vainly to be included in the amorous capture, and when they failed or were ignored, vindicate their outraged respectability in coarse recriminations. I saw farmers, seated under trees, weep fuddled tears because they could hold no more, and stuffed children, crying for nothing so much as breath. I had been drawn, as was natural to me, by the bait of gaiety and life, and this was my reward. The ground between the booths was strewn with trampled fragments of bread and meat, and sodden with rejected

ale. It was a fair, with all the licence of a day gathered into an hour.

I don't know how long I had been standing, absorbed in contemplation of this Gehenna, and of the stately mansion across the green, on whose terraces a gay company, gathered to see the beasts feed, was clearly distinguishable, when a sound of hoofs coming up the lane behind me brought me to myself; and almost immediately three horsemen, with very flushed faces, rode into view, and, perceiving me, halted. One was a fox-featured gentleman, in fulvous cloth; one, good-humoured and quiet, wore a grey coat; and the third was resplendent all over, and as drunk as Chloe. He, at the first sight of me, tumbled rather than dismounted from his horse, and, forsaking the reins, which the grey gentleman caught, came staggering upon me.

"Hey, my vitals!" he lisped, "whom the devil have we here?"

He was quite young, and like a pretty toy, with a spangled coat in the Maccaroni Club style, a great bow at his neck, and ribbons to his knees. But he frightened me with the stare in his glazed eyes; and as he advanced, I backed into the hedge.

"I was only looking," I fluttered. "I didn't mean any harm. Please let me go."

"Harm!" he exclaimed, with a tipsy crow. "O, but you're trespassing, missy, and must give an hic-count of yourself. Come 'long, now, before my lord."

I saw the eldest of the three regarding us from his saddle with a sort of mordant humour, and the sudden recognition of his state made my heart leap. Red, and lank-jawed, and vicious, he sat watching us as a fox might watch his cub negotiating the helpless struggles of a lamb. He always had a fine appetite for such occasions, and could sin very sweetly by proxy, could Hardrough.

"Wounds, my lord!" cried the boy, "is this a larsh surprise for me you've 'ranged? Besh preshent of all

the day. Come cock-horse, child, and we'll kiss a-riding."

He put an arm about me. For all my distress, the musky contact of him, so precious after my long degradation, seemed half to drug me from resistance. I struggled feebly to push him away.

"Get on with your gallophic," said he, addressing his companions knowingly. "I'll follerer by-m-by."

"Come, Salted," cried the grey gentleman suddenly, in a laughing, half-vexed way. "Remember what's due to your guests, child, now and to be. Come along and ride yourself sober, as you engaged."

"Shober, nunky! shober, you cake!" sputtered the fool. "Shober 'nough yourself to wa't me go on and break my neck—hey, my lord?"

He leered tipsily to the earl his father, who grinned, and blinked his red eyes.

"Let him be, George," said the nobleman. "Damme, the boy's not fit to ride a broomstick. You're precious anxious for the gipsy, brother. I'd as lief you was concerned for your nephew."

"And so I am," says the other hotly. "'Tis foul so to take advantage of a stranger and a child. Call your cub off, sir," says he, "if I'm not to take a whip to him."

He gathered his reins in, and twitched his heels. He was bronzed and comely, a man of thirty or so, younger by ten years than the earl. He, the latter, had turned quite white. A frost seemed to have pinched his cheeks. In another moment, I believe, he would have drawn his riding-switch across the handsome face, but in that moment I was aware of a lady hurrying up, and I broke from my captor, and fled to meet her.

"Help me!" I cried. "Don't let him hurt me!"

She received me very kindly. She was a tall and colourless figure, gentle in mien but with a bad complexion—the lady, in short, in whose company I had left Father Pope.

"Hardwick! George!" she whispered, in an outraged voice.

The earl pushed up to her, with a snigger.

"There, Sophy," said he. "What are you doin' here? But I'm glad you've come. Is this here your protégée? Well, take the little baggage away, that was near bringing us to words about her."

"Words!" she said. "This child!"

"O," he exclaimed, "that's all one! Come, boy!"

She detained him some minutes, murmuring to him as he bent down. At the end he rose, grinning at me.

"What!" says he—"the sly old crow! Be sure the little sweep wasn't fathered by a black cassock before you adopt her."

She started back, flushing scarlet.

"Hardrough!" she said; "I ask you to go on."

"Well, I will," said he, with a little breathless laugh, "and carry your secret, sister, safe in my keepin'."

He half wheeled, and in an ironic voice summoned the young viscount. The boy got to his horse as sulky as sin. In another minute the three gentlemen were ridden out of sight.

The moment they had disappeared the lady turned to me.

"Why didn't you keep by your friend?" she asked, rather sharply. "From what he tells me, you are in need of one."

I hung my head and broke into sobs. She was softened immediately.

"There," she said. "I didn't mean to be harsh; but discretion was so necessary. Will you come with me—I am the Lady Sophia Rowe—and we can discuss your case in safety at home? But every instant means peril, and we must hasten."

I suffered her to hurry me up the lane. Her gait took no grace from urgency, being awkward as with

most over-tall women, and the worse to view because she was reckless how she raised her skirts. In a little we came round a curve that swept beyond the limits of the green; and here, under some trees, we found her coach, which had been ordered round earlier, with the priest and his great folio ensconced glowering in it. In a moment we were in, and rolling along quiet country roads. The noise of the fairing died behind us. The world of new peace and beatitude lay before. For seven miles we sped soberly on, deeper and deeper into the pleasant hush, that was broken only by the incessant confidential murmuring of my companions.

At last, taking a road high above a little village bowered in trees, we turned between beautiful scrolled gates into a drive that seemed to me to pierce gardens as enchanting as the hanging ones of Babylon. There were soft lawns and placid groves of timber, with lofty rookeries. There were vivid parterres, and terraces stooping to blue depths, wheredown a little silver brook bubbled through mists of foliage. There were rose bowers, and great jars, like Plenty's horn, brimming petunias. There was a mossy fountain, with lilies and goldfish, and a baby Triton in the midst spurting a jet to heaven. There were grassy walks, and beyond their vistas the eternal solace of distance. And, dominating all, there was the house.

At least it seemed less to command than to partake of the serenity of which it was the habitable nucleus—the human nest in the garden. It stood before us, not suddenly, but in quiet revelation, a simple old structure of red brick, unlaboured with ornament, unweighted of stone, a pleasant home for happiness set on a wide level platform of grass and gravel. My eyes had hardly accepted it before my heart.

We alighted into a fragrant hall, and madam led me at once into a large low room with windows bent upon a heavenly prospect of woods and meadows; and there, bidding me await her until she could come and talk with me, shut me in, and withdrew.

I had not stood many minutes, in a silent dream of wonder and expectation, when the door opened softly again, and a little girl stole in. She was about my own age, or somewhat older, and very dark and pretty, but with foolish large eyes like a dog's. For some moments she stared at me, wondering, without a smile, then came and touched my hand.

"Madam sent me," she said. "I live here. I am her adoption child. Are you come to stay?"

I shook my head, bewildered.

"O," she whispered, "I hope so. I have no little friend at all, and you are so pretty."

"I have golden hair," I said. "We can't all be the same. But yours at least is very curly. What is your name?"

"Patience Grant," she said. "My mother died in the convent, and I have no father. I am not allowed to play with the village children. What is *your* name?"

I told her "Diana Please."

"It is a nice name," she said. "Did *your* mother too die in the convent? I am very happy here, but I shall be happier if you come."

Lady Sophia had entered softly while she spoke.

"Hush, Patty!" said she, with a smile. "And run away now."

The child went, looking wistfully back. *Ah, mignonnette, ma petite à jamais mémorable, toi que j'aime sans discontinuer!* How wert thou to me from the first the most attached of little dogs!

Madam drew me into a window, and looked earnestly into my eyes. As she held me, Father Pope entered and stood near, my morose and baleful inquisitor.

"Do you like my home?" she said, in her level, toneless voice. The labour of lifting it seemed always constitutionally beyond her.

I clasped my hands. "O, madam," I said, "I could be a very good Catholic here!"

She smiled, in a surprised way, then looked grave.

I waited in a fever of expectation for her to speak again. I had already decided that I would wish to be adopted like Patience, in whom I seemed to foresee a little adoring vassal, so welcome after my own long slavery, and that I must be adroit to gain my point. Brighthelmston, with its questionable potentialities, had darkened in contrast with this paradise. I felt even that it would not be good for me to return there; that I was destined for a virtuous, if not a devout life. It is no contradiction that I had not thought so an hour before. Our moral development is intermittent. Its phases of growth are inspirations of adaptation to circumstance. A fever made of Francis of Assisi a saint out of a profligate. These high lawns had revealed to me the pit from which I had escaped.

Lady Sophia looked very sweet and grave.

"Or anywhere, I hope," she said. "Faith is not a question of surroundings."

I was not so sure of that; but I held my tongue, hanging my head.

"Let me see your face," she insisted, and put her thin hand under my chin.

"It is a pretty and an innocent one," she declared. "How came you, child, in the position in which Father Pope found you?"

I told her how I had been stolen by the sweep, and had escaped from him rather than seem to concur in the violence offered to my religion.

"It was an ingenious and a courageous act," she said, gently kindling; "was it not, Father?"

The bear snorted, dissent or commendation—it was all one.

"Ask her about her mother," he growled.

"True," said the lady, with a gesture of involuntary repulsion, for which she the moment after atoned with a caress.

"She had been a Sister in the Hospital of St. Magdalen, Father Pope tells me," she said very low. "She had returned there to expiate her—her"—

"No," I broke in.

"You told me so," roared the priest.

"I didn't," I said, half crying. "You were looking at your book all the time I confessed."

Madame Sophia could not restrain a smile.

"Fie, Father!" she said. "I admit it does not sound the least probable part of the child's experiences."

But she sobered again in a moment.

"She did not return?" she asked. "Then"—

"She is dead," I whispered.

After all, I believed it was true; that she could not have survived the wreck of all things which my abduction must have meant to her. The gentlewoman gave a gasp of pity and self-rebuke, and enfolded me in her arms.

"Forgive me!" she cried. "O, I was cruel! The poor lost lamb! So white, so helpless, so delivered to the wolves! But"—she bethought herself—"where was this?— And your unhappy father?"

"He had taken me to Brighthelmston," I stammered; "he was not of our religion—of any. He made me dance before the pretty prince, and would have given me to him, but that the sweep whom he fought stole me out of revenge first."

The priest and the lady exchanged looks.

"Am I justified?" she asked. "The peril, the iniquity! O, surely, Father—surely!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Write to the Magdalens first," said he, "and verify it."

She thought a little, then addressed me again.

"And if I do, would you like to make your home here in the meantime, Diana?"

The strain had been very severe. I fell on my knees before her, weeping. I knew, from what my governess had once told me, that les Madelonnettes must confirm the worst of my story.

"O, madam," I cried, "if you would train me in goodness and piety!"

She kissed me, then looked up, her immobile face quite transfigured.

"Perhaps," she thrilled, "some day, perhaps some day to fill the place and vindicate the vows of the poor weak apostate who gave you life!"

"Write to the Magdalens," growled Father Pope.

VII

I AM PUT AWAY IN CAMPHOR

I CANNOT hold Lady Sophia altogether irresponsible for the loss to the Calendar of a very promising saint. I entered Wellcot enthusiastic to devote the rest of my days to the practices of piety and self-renunciation, and I was moved to this resolve not least by the example my benefactress seemed to offer me of the most perfect detachment from the world. Alas! I was too soon to realise how the chaste aloofness of a mind may mean only a vanity so sensitive, and an irritability so nervous, as for ever to be on their defence against unwarranted approaches. I had thought her serenely above the littlenesses of life; and all the time she only sat on a level with them, but apart, in alarm lest her moral distinction should be held to justify familiarities with her social. The folded wings of piety may be used to conceal some uncelestial humours. I had supposed, at least, that passion was the remotest from her temperament; and there even I was wrong, as you shall learn.

She wrote, in accordance with Father Pope's advice, to the Superioress of the sisterhood to which my mother had belonged. I confess, for all my confidence, I awaited the answer in some trepidation. It fulfilled, however, when it came, my best expectations. The charitable Mother confirmed the story of her former postulant's recreancy and flight with a profligate man of fashion—whither, she had never concerned herself to inquire. The woman, in leaving the convent gates,

she said, had died to her—to all, save the lord of hell, who, she was rejoiced now to hear, had so soon claimed and secured his own. She would command a Magnificat that night in praise of the eternal chastity; and there her interest in the matter ended. She wrote in French, with much Pharisaic unction, which betrayed, nevertheless, its underlying gall. Madam quoted to me only so much (I found an opportunity later to read the whole) as appeared to justify her in the course upon which she was resolved—my present adoption, that was to say, by her, for the sake of my soul. I was becomingly meek and grateful in placing myself unreservedly in her hands; and in this manner began my self-obliterating martyrdom of five long years in the placid nunnery of Wellcot.

For a time I was very happy, until a ripening intelligence revealed to me by degrees the limitations of my moral and material surroundings. I have no intention to detail the processes of that growth. I can hardly, indeed, claim an independent life until detached from its dull experiences. It is enough here briefly to review them.

My first warning disillusionment was the knowledge, to my infinite disgust, that Father Pope was to remain a permanency in the asylum to which accident had translated him. Whether his former patrons seized this opportunity—in the first reactionary days after riot—to rid themselves of an ungainly incubus, or whether—which is more probable—he himself manœuvred for transference to new hunting-grounds, not of souls, but grubs, I do not know. Anyhow, his baggage being his book, the change was easy, and at Wellcot he remained, titular chaplain to the Lady Sophia, but positive to a community of nuns across the valley, who were her most cherished protégées, and to whose ranks I, in the first blind fervour of my redemption, unprovisionally dedicated myself.

I had not been long settled before, speculating on the relationship between Shole and Wellcot-Herring,

I began to wonder if I was destined ever to see again the young gentleman who had so insulted me. Perhaps, I thought, I might help by my example, and even persuasion, to wean him from his evil courses. However, the opportunity was not to be given me, as it appeared he was not sufficiently in love with his aunt's ways to pay her even the periodic courtesy of a visit. But his father the earl came occasionally, and from him I was bent upon discovering whether or not my image was entirely effaced from the son's remembrance.

Happening to meet him alone in the gardens one day, I was actually emboldened to beg him to convey a message from me to the viscount that I forgave him.

He stopped, and looked at me with admiration; then took my chin in his hand.

"I shall do nothing of the sort, Miss Presumption," he said, in his thin, ironic voice. "But I'm not so particular for myself. You shall give me all of your confidences that you like."

"Thank you," I said saucily; "I will choose a handsomer to fill the place of my papa."

"Was he so handsome?" says he, grinning.

"He was the most beautiful man in the world," I answered.

"Well, I can believe it," he said. "But not so handsome as my brother George, hey?"

"Fifty thousand times," I said.

"And fifty thousand times better?"

"I don't know. He was good enough for me."

"That I can well believe," he chuckled; then took a turn or two and came back.

"Harkee, missy," says he, "I'm not going to peach on you, whatever you say, so you can be as free as air with me. Only promise not to make me jealous of my own son, and we'll be fast friends some day." And with a laugh, he left me.

I hated him instinctively, and longed for the time

when I could set my wits to discompose him. He was a widower, and socially and politically a man of bad character; and it should have been madam's duty to see that we were not brought into contact. But she could conceive no evil of the head of her house.

The brother, the good one, came near us no more than the viscount; which, nevertheless, did not trouble me, because I owed him a debt, and he was too poor in purse and reputation to expect me to liquidate it. Little Patty, after her manner, loved this unfortunate, whom she had seen often in former days, before his character went over some racing transaction, which ruined him and made him shy of his familiars. Her loyalty was proof against the worst. Where she was pledged, she never dropped away, and her heart had the truest instinct for finding and attaching itself to what was lovable in another. She adored nobility of mind, and was always my most faithful little adherent. I came early to discover that her origin was none of the most select, and on this account, perhaps, condescended to her more than I should. She repaid me with a blind devotion and admiration which were sometimes more affecting than diplomatic; and, before I had been at Wellcot a year, would have followed me at a word to shame or death, in very despite of her duty to her patroness. But by then, I think, she was coming with me to recognise certain flaws in the character of her former divinity.

It was from her in the first instance that I learned all that she knew of the family history: How my lord was a brute and libertine, who had done his wife to death, and was hated and feared of all, unless, perhaps, by the old dirty astrologer on the hill, who was his kinsman and Naboth and defier in one, holding the "Folly" in fee simple, as he did, from a scientific ancestor, and persistently refusing to be coaxed or bought out of it. How my lady, as pious as her brother was worldly, had embraced the Romish doctrine many years before, and

had not scrupled, on the Jesuit principle, to procure herself through his most questionable political relations a virtual exemption from the penalties which attached to the open exercise of her religion. How, trading on this connection, she had planted in Wellcot-Herring a community of the "Sisters of Perpetual Invocation," whose munificent patroness and dupe (Heaven forgive me! They were certainly very plausible little sybarites) she had constituted herself. How the honourable Mr. Rowe, his lordship's younger brother, was suspected of royal blood in his veins, and was only spared the scandal of proof so long as his nephew, the Viscount Salted, kept him out of the succession. How, in fine,—and this was where my interest was most intimately engaged,—her ladyship had once had an *affaire de cœur* with a Mr. de Crespigny, an artist, who came to paint her portrait, and who left it on the canvas half finished, being given, it was whispered, his congé in reluctant return for his insensibility to the proselytising advances of his sitter.

From little Patty I extracted all this *chronique scandaleuse*, and if she enlightened me in her own inimitable bashful way, blundering prettily on the truth out of innocence, I was not so backward even then as to be imposed upon by half-revelations, or to refrain from construing them on my own account into the language of experience.

And so I entered on my new life, having, to endear its strangeness, and soon, alas! its monotony to me, the most loving, simple-minded little comrade one might imagine. From the first my position, like my friend's, was undefined. We were not adopted daughters, or servants, or companions to madam, but a sort of pious pensioners on her bounty. She claimed some personal menial duties of us, which might be likened to those exacted of ladies of a royal bed-chamber. As was befitting with so great a princess, we might approach and handle her, but reverently as one might uncover a reliquary of sanctified bones. And, indeed, she was little else. For

myself, I did not much care. My eyes and ears served me for all her case, howsoever little of her intimacy was vouchsafed me.

I often put her to bed after supper and prayers, when she would love to engage me in little drony dialectics on faith. We had amicable contests of wit, God save me! on the qualities which endeared our favourite saints to us. I observed that the male beatitudes were her choice. Her room was hung with as many "Fathers" as a fribble's is with Madonnas of the opera-house. The ways of piety are strange. I was no *dévôte*, alas! like madam, yet I should have been abashed to go to bed in such company.

But, indeed, there was no disputing with her principles. Faith was her covering argument in everything. She wore it like a garment, high-necked and impenetrable; only, to my taste, it was none the more becoming for being fitted over broken stay-bones. Then, too, she moved so stately by faith, that I had often speculated why her heels should be trodden over, until I discovered that she had bandy legs. Truly faith, like charity, covers a multitude of sins. I attribute it to her that mine came so soon to be in myself. I have never had reason to be ashamed of anything it hid; only instinct tells me to be more particular about my garters than my scapular. If the Lady Susannah Rowe had found herself being spied upon by the Elders, she would have snatched and donned the latter, and had complete faith in its shelter. That may be grace, but it is not graceful, I think. Since the first mother started the fashions, there has been every obligation on us to consult appearances; and I at least, though never more worldly than the most, have persistently declined to let Faith make an ostrich of me.

She used often to send me to the convent across the valley with messages to the nuns; and I was early in discovering that I was the more welcomed by them when a little offering of fowls or hothouse grapes accompanied me. Then I could gain indulgences as many as I wanted

for my peccadilloes—up to twenty at least for a couple of fat gallinas—and perhaps rather presumed upon my purgatory in consequence.

This community was a praying order and eternally vowed from washing, as a personal indelicacy; or from stepping beyond its convent gates, as a first *faux pas* into the world; or from ministering to any needs but its own; or, in short, from being of any practical use on the earth whatever, save as an authorised agency for the distribution of “indulgences.” A natural consequence of all of which was that it grew to be a very pot-bellied little community, as tight-skinned and ruddy as the pears on its own south wall, and, through its Superioress, as knowing a judge as any of old port and early asparagus. The bell that prostrated it on its fat little knees to Angelus was the same that rang it to dinner. The throat of the thing was hoarse with the steam of rich pasties and salmis of game that rose from the convent kitchen hard by. It had mushroom pits and a peach-hung pleasaunce, and, indeed, by the help of my lady, was altogether as epicurean a little company for saints’ feast days as could be gathered. The devil, it is certain, sets up his tent in an empty stomach. He would have found close quarters, as was proper, in the Convent of Perpetual Invocation. I will say for the Sisters that I never heard a cross word among them.

Now, to have the command of indulgences, for feast days, and for dispensations from fast, in such a neat little paradise as theirs, seemed to me at the first a very desirable thing. Only I hoped that by the time I was ripe for the novitiate, the chaplain would have been replaced by one more personable. The Mother had, in common decency, to undertake to instruct me and Patty by and by in the articles of our creed, and Father Pope, complete gentleman, to conduct our secular finishing. We never saw any other man, except village chawbacons and, at rare intervals, the foxy earl. It was a deadly life. I could not have endured it but for the society of

my sweet little *adoratrice*. She grew up the dearest thing, with the face of a Christian shepherdess. One saw lambs, not babies, in her eyes. Holding her little kind hand in memory, I pass over four years of this self-obliteration, until I awaken to find myself in my seventeenth year.

VIII

I MEET MR. NOEL DE CRESPIGNY

LIFE without the male element is worse than being limited to shop windows for the fashions. We can read with patience in a nunnery of the modes, but not of marrying and giving in marriage. Still, I will ask any candid critic to judge if an utmost desperation could have induced me to a conduct, with an accusation of which madam inaugurated the series of misunderstandings which came to arise between us—an attempted corruption of Father Pope, to wit! The whole truth of this fantastic invention is as follows.

When I was near fifteen I had begun to grow troubled in my conscience as to my Confirmation. How could I face the cloister, an uncertified soldier of my creed? The chaplain had seemed kinder to me of late; or perhaps it would be truer to say, less bearishly unapproachable. To be sure, he could not always be adamant to the natural graces it was his business to help adorn. And, in proportion as he relaxed, I was moved to conciliate him with fifty little winning attentions, to which he could not be altogether insensible. I found plausible excuses for his confounding entomology with theology, citing the "little Bedesman of Christ" in vindication of the Nature God. I learned to rear clammy grubs in pots of earth, that I might surprise him with the results—beautiful winged creatures which I likened to the souls emancipated under his tutelage. I discovered, or invented, a hundred symbols for his hagiology. I sewed buttons on his coat, and brushed his great hat, with

actual reverence for the moth which had settled in it from the brain below. Was it my fault if the ridiculous creature misconstrued all these little wistful *égards*? I sought my way only by him, as one might propitiate a surly but indispensable guide, and in my utter innocence took his morose silences, and the scowling suspicion which grew in his eyes, for some late dawn of sympathy, some increased consideration, if not tenderness, towards the pupil whom he was conscious of his heart having maligned. How cruelly my trust was abused, will show in an interview to which madam unexpectedly summoned me.

"Diana," she said—she was seated knitting a comforter for the monster himself, and her lips, as she bent over her work, had a mechanical but rather shaky smile on them—"have you a daughter's regard for our good chaplain?"

"O yes, madam!" I answered, wondering what was to come.

"Yet it is not a daughter's part to indite love sonnets to her Father," she said steadily, without looking up.

I stared, and flushed, and burst into tears. She also reddened, and produced a paper from her pocket.

"Is this yours?" she demanded. "He found it slipped into his breviary. It appears to me to bear only one construction."

"And what is that, madam?" I asked coldly. My little outbreak had been mastered as soon as vented. My heart blazed with anger over this outrageous Cymon in a cassock.

"I put the question to you," she said, her thin bosom heaving a little. "If it is as I suspect, I should blush to name it."

"Blush rather for yourself," I said, in the same chill tone, "to plant the slander in a young girl's soul. I will be a Catholic no more."

She rose, pale and agitated.

"Do you know what you say?" she breathed in fear. "You! self-dedicated to the cloister!"

"I renounce the pledge!" I cried, in a sudden burst of passion. "I will no longer believe what Father Pope believes, or confess again to him anything but lies, since those are what he likes to trade in."

"Hush!" she said, aghast at my fury. Her hands trembled, fluttering the paper. "Hush! Be calm! You say things you cannot mean. God forgive you the threat of such apostasy!"

"And you," I cried, still stormily, "such a witness against a poor child's character."

"No, no," she entreated, almost abjectly, "I wish only the truth. Father Pope wishes only the truth. Tell me frankly, do you recognise these lines?"

With a great effort I subdued my emotion, and took the paper frigidly from her hand. It was folded at the following verse, which I had to bite my lips, pretending to read:—

"Thrice happy she who from thy kindling eye
Shall draw some spark to illuminate her breast,
A wistful wanderer between earth and sky,
With doubts of love's true haven sore oppressed."

"Do you recognise them?" she repeated.

"Yes, madam," I acknowledged, looking up between reserve and defiance.

"You do?" she murmured, taken aback. "And it is your hand?"

"No, madam," I answered quietly. "It is Miss Grant's, but disguised."

She echoed the word, at once incredulous, and fearful of exciting another outbreak by appearing so.

"Disguised! For what purpose? And to whom addressed?"

"To me," I answered. "It was part of a game between us; but we will play it no more."

She echoed in amazement, "A game!" Then asked faintly, "What game?"

"I was the Hermit of the Rocks," I said, "and Miss Grant the Princess Camilla, who wrote to consult me as

to her vocation, whether for the cloister or for marriage with a pious young gentleman."

It was an inspiration, which I had no sooner uttered than I feared for my rashness. But I need not have. Madam, as her slow perceptive kindled, grew one shine of happy intelligence.

"A game!" she repeated, smiling holy-motherly over the decorous innocence of our inventions. "Well, I will say it was a very proper one, though a little ambiguous in the articles of love to be addressed to a hermit. But how came it in the chaplain's book, child?"

I confessed that I had had the curiosity to read in the Father's breviary, and must unwittingly have left the paper there for a marker. She kissed me then, and, while deprecating my inquisitiveness in matters which did not concern me, apologised very handsomely, I will say, for having so traduced me on a shred of evidence.

"It shall be a lesson to me, and a penance," she said. "But, child, go now and retract your wicked recantation, before perhaps the devil shall claim you to your sin."

"It was very hard, madam," I said, still rebellious. "Why, being disguised, should Father Pope have decided as of course that the verses were mine?"

"Ah!" she said, blushing and embarrassed. "That I do not know—I think; but little Patty is no genius."

The moment I was free, I hurried palpitating to my friend, and confessed all, and implored her, by the love between us, to play her part in the little innocent deception I had practised. She gazed at me with her sweet shocked eyes, as if I were inviting her to murder.

"You really meant them for him, for Father Pope?" she whispered, half choking. "O, Diana! It was blasphemy!"

"It was," I said, "to waste the Princess Camilla on such a block."

Then, as my friend still cried out, I knelt, and took her waist prisoner in my arms, and begged to her.

"I am not like you, darling. I pine and pinch in this cold air. If it was not for you, you little warm thing, I should run away with Giles, the handsome stable-boy."

"Don't," she wept. "You don't mean it. Say you only intended it for a joke!"

"Of course I only meant it for a joke," I said, urging her; "though it's true I believed the creature was expecting it of me. But 'tis a joke that will cost me dear if you don't back me."

"O!" she cried, despairing, "I do, I will. But how can I ever pretend to have wrote them, when that cat rhymes with lap is the best I know of verse."

"You little dear," I said, laughing in sheer love of her artlessness. "Pretend nothing, but hold your tongue."

That she would have done for me, I think, though they racked her to confess; and all might yet have gone well, had not the Lady Sophia, meddlesome like most self-righteous consciences, sent for her to question if, after all, her simple verses might not have been the instinctive expression of *her* leaning towards the cloister. My poor transparent angel managed to articulate a panic denial of any such tendency; though, indeed, there was no need to, to any but a blindworm. If ever little maid was built for loving, or to lay her pretty hair in a puddle for some rogue to reach heaven by, it was she. The sense of guilt would confound her, however; and, what between her duty to madam and her loyalty to me, she must have answered her examination so ambiguously as to raise some new doubts and suspicions in the minds of her inquisitors.

She flew back to me with very red eyes, and a fresh horror of the imposition she was forced to practise.

"I will never, never tell," she sobbed, "though they tear me to pieces. But O, Diana! I don't want to be a nun."

I comforted her, though furious with the others for their Jesuitical practices on her innocence.

"Wait," I cried, "and I will pay them both out! What right had they, after what I said, to try and torture a lie out of you? Don't fear for the convent, child. I pledge my word you shall have a husband and fifty children, nun or no nun."

"I want no husband," she answered, blushing and clinging to me, "and no lover but you."

I have taken pains to record her fond little reply, in view of an odious charge, once concocted to my injury, of my having traded upon my friend's faith in me to rob her heart of its dearest possession. That, indeed, was, then and always, no less than her loved Diana, of whom none was ever permitted by her to take precedence. Any sacrifice which was designed to maintain those mutual relations she thought too cheap for discussion.

One result, however, of her "questioning" was that madam's attitude towards me was thenceforth marked by a reserve and jealousy which, inasmuch as I was unconscious of having done anything to merit it, served only to prejudice me against a religion which could be used for a cloak to so much hypocrisy. I grew quickly disenamoured of my supposed vocation, and decided that faith, which seemed largely a matter of digestion, could be better realised through independence. In short, in the world I could reach beatitude through twenty self-indulgences to one in the convent; and, such being the case, and my constitution perfect, it seemed folly to take the short way.

Madam seized an early opportunity after this to inquire into my plans for retiring from the world and taking the veil. I confessed to her, in reply, that her late suspicions had engendered in me thoughts, a sense of grievance, inimical to my right contemplation of so

momentous a sacrifice. She was very much shocked and troubled, and recommended me a stricter observance of all those self-obliterating virtues which are such a comfort to those who don't practise them. She rebuked my pride; she prescribed fasting and discipline and maceration—tortures which would have killed a dray-man—in order to lower and submit my system to its final severance from the world. She would have had me at her mercy before she drove in the knife; only, unluckily for her, my constitution was impregnable. It flourished equally whether on bread and water or *vol au vent*; and, finally, she surrendered to it. I rather liked a little pious game we played, called the Moral Lotto, in which the discs were sins, and those left uncovered at the end entailed an obligation on the losers to maintain a particular guard against the temptations they expressed. Though we all, in the end, must have been warned through the calendar, from simony to powder-puffs, I believe the contest was so sanctified to her by intention that she read a design of Heaven in every missing counter; and the fact that I generally won, did more than many assurances to convince her that I was perhaps after all not so black as she had painted me.

But, between me and Father Pope, after that little *malentendu*, there was no quarter asked or given. He treated me with a persistent coarse rudeness, and I retaliated with all the interest of wit I dared. I dropped blobs of wax on his spectacles; left his Hagiology open under a drip from the ceiling; put crumbs of cheese in his cabinets of moth to tempt the mice in; and confessed his own most obvious sins to him as mine, for which I accepted furious penances as meekly as a lamb. He hated me, and I contrived at least to give him a substantial reason for such an abuse of his cloth.

Now, I will mention one only other little incident before I pass on to the subject of this chapter. I was playing in Wellcot attics on a certain wet afternoon

with Patty, when I discovered a locked Bluebeard chamber.

"What is it?" I said; but she did not know. I tried the handle; I peered vainly into the keyhole; finally, I took a pin from my hair, and contrived a little pick of it.

"O, what are you going to do?" whispered the child, quite scared.

"Get in, if I can," said I.

"Don't!" she said, horrified. "If we are shut out, 'tis for a reason."

"Of course," I answered. "And it's no good looking for it on this side of the door."

She clasped her hands in a little paralysis of curiosity while I worked. It was a simple lock, and I was successful. As the door swung open, we saw before us a sky-lit room, wedged under the slope of the roof, and quite empty save for a framed picture, which leaned to the wall back outwards. Patty uttered a tiny cry—

"O, Diana! It's the portrait!"

In a moment, all excitement, we stole in a-tiptoe. The place was very still and ghostly. Only on the dusty canvas itself lay a melancholy grid of light. Palpitating in our sense of guilt, we turned the frame round, let it drop softly back again; and there, before our eyes, bloomed a smiling, wistful face. The light, which had saddened it in reverse, was quickened now to an illuminating glory. It greeted and dimpled to us—the face of a dead woman risen.

A dead woman. Had she ever lived? I could not believe it, thinking of that unsympathetic *dévoté* downstairs.

"Was she *ever* like that?" I whispered.

"She was beautiful," murmured Patty fervently. "I remember him painting this."

"And going away, and leaving it unfinished?" said I: for, indeed, the portrait was but sketched in, though masterly in its promise.

"Yes," said the little girl, gulping. "And I never supposed what had become of it till now."

It seemed incredible, the change that but a few envious years had wrought. Had love done this thing before me? Or could love forsaken so warp the loveliness which Love himself had created? It gave me a new little thrill of respect for the humanised Sophia; because, whatever the truth of her face, a man had been found to see this beauty in it.

"She was St. Cecilia," whispered Patty. "There is the harp in her lap."

It was without strings—an unborn music. Perhaps the Christian lady had declined to accept a pagan Muse for midwife, and had temporised with her would-be deliverer, hoping to convert him. If so, she had played her cards badly. I wondered if the man had been a fortune-hunter. But in that event Madame Sophia would certainly be Madame de Crespigny.

Whatever the case, however, the picture made a deep impression on me, and from my first moment of seeing it I was haunted by the desire to become myself the subject of such a master's devotion. *Ma vue et mes minauderies firent tout-à-coup tourner la girouette.* For the first time I felt myself a woman, encumbered with the heavy responsibilities of her sex.

One day—it was some eighteen months later—returning from a commission to the convent, I walked straight into the presence of the original of the picture and its painter. Yes, that is the truth. He had run faith at last to earth, it seemed, and, armed with it, was returned to add the strings to the abortive harp, and perfect the ancient harmony. I could have thought that, to do so, he had need of faith indeed; until, looking at madam, I started in sheer wonder. She was transfigured—rejuvenated. The happiest light—bashful, coy, defiant, and surrendering its defiance—was in her eyes. She was more like a wife in the first wonder of motherhood than the starved *religieuse* of yesterday.

And the cause! Ah, my Alcide! The creature rose

upon my entrance, and I could have laughed in the face of my own befooled ideal. I had thought of Raphael and the Fornarina; and, behold! a slack, half-drowned-looking figure, with an expression, and conduct of its limbs, as if it were just risen gasping from a pond—there he stood, no sort of natural fowl at all, but a freak of genius like a five-legged calf at a fair.

"He! he!" giggled he, and held himself as if he were waiting to be told what to do next.

He was tall, it is true; and there was a good deal of him, mostly gnarled bone, if that counted to his credit. His forehead, streaked with dark hair turning grey, was strong and ample, and in itself something of a feature; but, mercy! the loose indetermination of his lower lip, and the way it overhung, foolish and disproportionate as an elephant's, the little folded chin! As I stared, too mortified for manners, he returned my gaze, suddenly startled, it seemed, into a speechlessness so stertorous that little Patty, who had entered with and stood behind me, fell back a step in confusion.

"Ah!" he exclaimed at that, chuckling, "and is hee-ar the little girl I knew?"

He spoke, when he did at last, drawlingly, and ended, as was his way, by wrinkling his thin hooked nose and hee-hawing a little laugh through it.

"She is grown, is she not?" said madam, answering for Patty, to whom he had referred, though indeed his eyes were all the time on me. Her voice was so changed and soft, I hardly recognised it.

"She is greern," he said. "She is become, it appe-ars, a double cherry."

"No," said madam seriously, "the other is a second little foundling of my care, and destined to God's—*our* God's" (she added coyly)—"service, de Crespigny."

She had no sense of humour, the dear creature. The next moment, noticing the direction of his gaze, with a little frown she bade us begone to our books.

We fled, and, once remote, I turned, with a tragic-hysterical stamp, upon my companion.

"Patience! And is that donkey *him*?"

"It is Mr. Noel de Crespigny," she said, amazed.

"He is not— O, Diana, do you really think him?"—

"Hee-haw!" I broke in, with a little passion of laughter; and then fury overcame me.

"How dared she," I stormed, "how dared she tell him that lie about me?"

"What lie?" said poor Patty.

"Why, to claim me to her worship of a golden ass," I cried.

"It was a calf," said my friend, bewildered.

I screamed with laughter.

"O, don't!" Patty implored. "It really was, Diana."

"You dear!" I gasped. "I daresay it was. But he was so badly made, I couldn't tell."

She followed me upstairs, utterly bewildered. On the landing above we encountered a strange sight. The picture—the picture—was already on its way down from the attics. A groom and maid bore it, and the oddest creature stood above, superintending its resurrection.

"Gogo!" whispered Patty; "it's Gogo!"

I could well believe it of such a monster.

He was a man, and a huge one, down to his mid-thighs; and there he ended in a couple of wooden stumps. His face, lapped in a very mask of red bristle, was as savage as sin; and he growled and rumbled like an interdicted volcano.

"Ay," he thundered, "I'm Gogo, the Dutch tumbler. Who calls me by my name?"

Holding with one hand by the banisters, he struck with the strong stick he carried at the stairs, missed the tread, and was within an inch of falling. The stick rattled down, and he swung and clung with both hands to the rail. In an instant, some whimsical impulse sent me tripping lightly up to help him.

"Take my arm," I said, "down to the landing."

The giggling servants paused in their task to stare up; but the monster himself laboured round, with quite a stunned look.

"To help—*me*," he whispered hoarsely; "the little scented rush to prop the oak!"

I was in love with his changed voice at once. It was something to meet only two-thirds of a man.

"No, no," he said, touching my arm as if it were a relic. "I'm Gogo, the colour-grinder, the bottle-washer—not worthy to latch your ladyship's little shoe. I'll go down—I'll go down. Ho-ho! it's easy. I've done it all my life."

While he spoke, the odd creature had descended unaided, and, recovering his stick, struck his wooden limbs fiercely with it.

"Do you see?" he cried. "A stiff-kneed dog as ever limped after Fortune!"

He flounced upon the servants, and roared them into care of their charge; then turned again to me, where I stood with my friend, who had run trembling to my shelter.

"'Tis our 'market, ladies," he said in apology. "I must be particular in its custody. We deal in new lamps for old; in"—

He descended a few steps, then turned again.

"Ah!" he groaned, tragic and comical in one. "Pity the poor genii who has to serve; pity him—pity him."

He heaved a sigh that would have turned a windmill, and followed the picture, and disappeared.

"Patty!" I whispered, when he was gone—"Patty! Lord, Patty! who *is* the creature?"

"I'm terrified of him," she gulped. "He's Mr. de Crespigny's dog, he calls himself, and follows his master everywhere, loving and growling at him. He used to say there was no such painter in the world, if he could be kept to it; but he always frightened me dreadfully. I do hope they won't stop long."

"H'm!" I said. "And is that queer name all he's got?"

"I never heard of another," she answered. "But anyhow, it suits him."

"Yes," I said—and sighed—"if he only had legs!"

IX

I AM COMMITTED TO THE —

I LEARNED, as you shall understand, to readjust my first impression of de Crespigny. It is certain one must not judge the quality of the wine by the vessel. He was a great artist, who ran quickly to waste in the passions evoked of his own conceptions. From the mouth downwards he was a sensualist, and not fit to trust himself with a fair model. Shut into a monastery, he would have been a Fra Angelico.

At the first he captured me, when once I was familiarised with the ungainly exterior of the creature. To see him work—ardent, engrossed, unerring in the early enthusiasm of a subject—was a revelation. He stood so slack, he ran so to moral exhaustion when delivered of his inspiration, it was impossible to recognise the master of a moment ago in this invertebrate body with the loose wrists and silly laugh. If he could only have been kept always at the high pressure of his conceptions! Sometimes I wondered if it was in me to make him great and hold him. It would have been splendid to be the Hamilton to this Romney. Yet in the end I found the game not worth the candle. He was soft wax, indeed, for seven-eighths of his length, and the littlest puff from red lips could blow all the flame out of his head.

Still, while it lasted, his influence over me was an education. His portfolios were the very minutes of inspiration—suggestions, impressions of loveliness, caught and recorded and passed by for others. He finished little, and perhaps would have been a lesser artist and

a stronger man if he could have laboured to consolidate his dreams. He taught me that not facts, but shadows of facts—the reflections, most moving, most intimate which they cast—are the real appeals to the emotions; that there is no landscape so beautiful as its reflection in a mirror, no chord so pathetic as its silent vibration in one's heart. Perhaps the heavens are an eternity of echoes, of spectral perfumes, of dreams derived from experience, and we the authors of our own immortality. If so, we should live passionately who would dream well.

What this man lacked in nerve and backbone, his strange servant and comrade supplied, and many times over. He was the oddest monstrosity—savage in criticism, caustic in humour, a Caliban bellōwing grief and tenderness through hairy lungs. How he could ever have come to attach himself, and passionately, to so flaccid a bear-leader, was a problem pure for psychology. Now, at least, the two were inseparable as— Ah, my friend! I was on the point of saying as Valentine and Proteus, but the analogy, I protest, is too poignant; for have not I too been cruelly declared the Sylvia who divided them?

The portrait, on that first afternoon, was carried down to a convenient closet on the ground floor; and there de Crespigny worked on it, always alone, or in the sole company of his henchman. When finished for the day, he would invariably lock the canvas into a press, and none, not even I (there is virtue in that parenthesis), was permitted to see it. The room was held sacred to him; and madam herself refrained so religiously from intruding on its privacy as to evoke, in her guileless trust of the singleness of his conversion, the very hypocrisy which to her faith was inconceivable. For, indeed, he converted this closet—which stood safely remote and approached by a back-stair way—into a sanctuary for deceit. Often, to confess the whole truth, when she supposed me engrossed in books or the construction of celestial samplers, was I closeted with de Crespigny and Gogo, learning to handle a brush, or

inspire one, while Patty, with a code of signals, kept panic watch on the stairs.

Madam's exclusion, no doubt, cost her many a patient sigh. She wondered over the idiosyncrasies of genius, which preferred, or professed to prefer, to labour its mental impressions rather than toil to record the living and mechanical pose. Still, it was true, the Sophia of to-day, however rejuvenated, was scarcely the model of that older time; and that he could finish that beautiful inspiration from her staidier personality was what it was folly, perhaps, in her to expect.

Poor woman! Though I had my grudge, and no taste or reason to commiserate such vanity, I suffered some qualms of remorse for the part I was led to play. It is natural, after all, for the sex to see itself never so immortal as through the eyes of love; and, when a man has once praised its complexion, to claim for itself an eternity of roses.

Father Pope, the old spiritual curmudgeon, never quite credited, I think, the genuineness of this late conversion. I daresay, from his experience in the confessional box, he knew his man pretty well, and the value of such emotional abjurations. The sick devil turned monk was not to his taste; and, if he ventured to intimate as much, the coldness which certainly befell between madam and him at this time was easily to be accounted for. It all amused me hugely; and I felt delightfully wicked while the fun lasted. But retribution, my friend, was to overtake your naughty little Diana.

One day, stealing into the studio, I found Gogo alone, grinding colours into a little mortar.

"God ye good e'en, little serpent," said he. "You can sit and beguile me for practice till my master comes."

"Gogo," I said, shocked. "Why do you call me by such a name?"

"Because you are as like Eve as two peas," growled he.

"Eve was not a serpent, but a beautiful woman," I answered, pouting.

"And so was Lamia ; and yet she was a serpent," he grunted.

"I don't know what you mean. You said Eve."

"Well, why not?" he replied, turning his red, morose-looking eyes on me. "Eve accused the serpent of beguilement, didn't she? and Adam Eve? But Eve was made out of the man, therefore Adam accused himself. But Eve accused the serpent; therefore Adam accused the serpent. Yet he accused Eve; therefore Eve was the serpent, which is what she would, and will, never understand. O, God bless her! God bless her! Which, if He would do, blessing the serpent, might unriddle this sinful problem of life!"

He set to pounding vigorously with his pestle, and for a minute I watched him in a bewildered silence. There was always something in this shorn Cyclops which oddly attracted me.

"Gogo," I said quite softly.

He threw down his pestle at once, and faced round, writhing his hands together, and glaring at me.

"Who spoke?" he said, in hoarse, trembling tones. "A voice from the garden making me in love with my own clown name. O, always so, always so, thou spirit of Eve; and, though it lost the world to God, I'd take the apple from thy hand."

I laughed a little tremulously, as he stumped across the floor and stood close before me. The vision of this great storm of a creature, condemned to play the "comic relief" in the tragedy of his own manhood, came as near my heart as anything.

"Look!" he cried, his rugged chest heaving; "I can't kneel to you, and I'm your slave. I walk open-eyed, hating and adoring you, into the toils you spread for our feet. Feet!" he groaned, looking down, with a despairing gesture. "Perhaps—who knows?—having them, I might have escaped."

"How did you lose them, poor Gogo?" I said.

"Hating and adoring," he groaned, unheeding my question, "hating and adoring. Look, little serpent: I could crush your slender throat for what you do, and hold on, and sob my soul away to see you die. Why have you come between us? United, we were strong, he and I. I drove his genius on, and loved the poor ape for its spark of divinity, and propped the weak spirit while it wrought. You knock the prop away, you knock the prop away, and we both fall; and where is *my* compensation for the injury?" He clasped his great hands to me: "Give me back my genius," he cried in pain, "and let us go."

I rose to my feet, half moved and half resentful.

"It is not I who take him or want him. I will not come here again."

As I turned, he barred my way.

"No," he said, near sobbing, "I lied. Do what you will with us: make us angels or swine—I am content, so long as I may serve you."

As he spoke, the door opened, and de Crespigny entered. He greeted me with a rather shifty look, I thought, and his manner seemed too distraught to affect any particular notice of his servant's obvious emotion.

"O, well, *ma bella* Unanina," said he; "but a little sitting for this afternoon, please."

I flushed, and was about to refuse to remain at all, when an imploring scowl from Gogo softened me. With plenty of hauteur, I stalked into a little curtained-off alcove which was consecrated to me for tiring-room, and there dressed for model. When I emerged again, my feet and arms were bare, my hair loose in a golden fillet, and, for the rest, I wore a kind of seraph smock, in which *les convenances* had been constrained to clothe me for the peerless Una.

For as Una I was being painted. Looking one day through de Crespigny's portfolios, I had come upon some "impressions," royal, strenuous, of lions in the Tower menagerie, and was admiring the lithe, strong

darlings, when his voice breathed behind me, with that little eternal foolish giggle.

"Have you decided, naughty?"

"Yes," I whispered. "I will be the fairy lady whom the lion came to devour, and remained to serve and protect, because she was so pure and innocent."

He did not know who I meant; so I found him the book and place.

"Ah, to be sure!" said he, reading eagerly. "She laid her stole aside, did she? Yes, it is an inspiration. It will suit me, if it does you."

So I was painted wonderfully as Una, making my own "stole" from one of Patty's bedgowns, and glorying, out of my very shamefacedness, to feed the inspiration, while it lasted, of this impassioned art. Now, for days it had wrought without slackening, so that it was an offence to me to find it suddenly become, it seemed, without apparent cause or reason, out of tune with its subject. He worked fitfully, dully, almost, as it were, disregarding my presence, and drawling commonplaces the while to Gogo, who had returned to his pestle and mortar, and was grinding away sullenly.

"Gogo," he yawned presently, after an idle, preoccupied silence, "which would you rather marry, a woman of wit or virtue?"

"Neither, you blattering genius!" cried the other, turning round with such an instant roar that I was almost frightened off my perch.

The master, accustomed to his strange fellow's moods, only laughed, and leaned back indolent.

"Why, you old de-ar?" said he.

Gogo thundered.

"She's a rotten fish at best, shining the more the more corrupt she is."

"But if she don't shine?" said de Crespigny coolly.

"Then she's a dull fish," said Gogo, "but a fish still."

The other mused, and sniggered.

"—Who's for ever playing to be caught," added Gogo,

grumbling. "She loves the angle. Play her what you like, man, only throw her back when hooked."

"Mr. Gogo!" I exclaimed.

"Ay, Mistress Una," said he, "you're all pretty players, from miss to my lady dowager. Don't tell me. You all love to excite the emotions you don't understand, and then off with you from the stage, sweet ethereals, to the suppers of steak and porter which you do, while Jack and my lord are wetting their pillows with tears over your sensibility."

"Thank you," I said, rising, highly offended. "As I, for one, am not playing to be hooked, I'll take your warning in time."

I had expected de Crespigny to strike in, in angry protest over his servant's insolence; but, to my astonishment, he did not move or interfere. A little pregnant silence ensued, and the tears were already rising to my eyes, when, to my horror, I heard madam's voice at the door.

"De Crespigny," she said, "may I come in for once?"

He stumbled to his feet, and stood paralysed a moment, before he answered—

"A minute. You know the conditions: I must hide it away, and then"—

When she entered a little later, there was he standing to receive her with a spasmodic grin; his easel was empty, Gogo pounded at his mortar, and I—I was shrunk behind the curtain, peeping in a very shiver of terror.

She looked at him with a little shaky propitiating smile. Her eyes were red, as if she had been crying. She tried to speak, and could not. He understood so far, the poor clown, and bade his servant withdraw. When they were alone, she turned upon him with a little appealing motion of her hands.

"Am I never to be allowed to see it?" she asked.

He frowned, and bit his trembling lip.

"No, no," she said, "I know the sensitiveness of your beautiful art. Only, O, Noel! I cannot rest where we

ended just now. Believe me, it was so far from my wish to offend or alarm you. But time goes on, and the pledge this finished picture was to redeem is withheld, until I am at a loss how to explain."

"To whom?" he muttered sullenly, "to that priest? O, I know. What right has he, a grudging Churchman, and you a saint?"

"O, indeed, I am but a weak woman!" she said, with a faint smile, "and he an anointed Father. He does right—dear, he does—to be jealous for his daughter. It is only that he would ask you, that I would ask you, what period"—

"Art is not to be forced," he interrupted her peevishly. "I made the finishing of this picture, as it was begun—as it was begun, mind—the condition of my being received into your Church. Didn't I, now?"

"Yes," she sighed; "but there are some vows better broken."

"A bad recommendation to what you call the truth," he sneered.

"But, Noel, it *is* the truth," she cried. "O, say you are convinced that it is!"

"Well, I don't know," he answered, "since you bid me to a lie."

"I will take the burden," she cried, her eyes streaming, "to save the soul I love."

She hardly breathed the final word. For a wonder, the poor creature she entreated found enough in it to move him.

"There," he said, "don't distress yourself, Sophia. I'll work hot-handed on the picture to-morrow. There, I promise I will."

"Thank you, Noel," she whispered, so kindling, so grateful, that de Crespigny shrunk before her. "I—I won't interrupt you any longer. It was like you, kind and considerate, not to blame me for breaking your rule."

The room remained so still after her going that I thought he too had followed, until, stealing out presently

in a panic, I found him seated in a corner, biting his nails.

"I had better go now, hadn't I?" I whispered, half choking.

"Yes," he growled, "to the devil!"

X

I BEWITCH A MONSTER

ON the following morning, going indifferently by the studio, where was a back way into the grounds, I encountered Gogo.

"He's at work on the portrait," hē said, standing moodily against the room door. "He'll be at it all day. It's no good your coming."

I tossed my head, vouchsafing no reply, and, singing to myself, passed on and out.

The day after, descending the stairs, I observed that the studio door was left ajar. I laughed, taking no other notice, and went my way into the garden.

On the third day, seeing de Crespigny walk out with his Sophia, I borrowed the opportunity to slip down and investigate. The truth was, I was devoured with curiosity to learn how madam's little explosion had stimulated the artistic verve, and to obtain a glimpse of the portrait, even, if necessary, by bending myself to the corruption of my poor infatuated Gogo. But I was to be disappointed, for the room was empty, and the canvas locked into its press.

Peering here and there, considerably chagrined, in the hope of discovering the key, I came, in the alcove, upon the full-sleeved waistcoat in which the artist usually worked, and, diving eagerly into the pockets thereof, found, not the key indeed, but some scraps of paper, much scribbled over, which instantly aroused my curiosity, and, presently, my amusement.

"Ho-ho!" thought I, "you are inspired in other than the pictured arts, are you, my gentleman? A poet,

and fainting in the perfume of some little naughty Mignonette!"

So he had fancy-named the subject of his agonised Muse; and, indeed, why should I prevaricate to myself about the application? I blushed a little, making myself merry over these suffering scrawls and scratches, of which, I was sure, my own poor little person must be the victim. I had a face, it seemed, the calendar of innocence; *une bonne poitrine*; a sweetest little double chin, like a robin's throat swelled with song. I put my hand to my neck. I could not but admit that the poor man had taken a poetic licence; but, in truth, it was a very example of the licence that was wont to drug his art. The flesh held his fine imagination in thrall, and laboured his first spiritual conceptions into Parisian models. He was divine only in his sketches—impressions. When he wrought to improve upon them, he became transubstantiated.

So this was his repentance! He had spent the brief period of it in painting me in verse, since he was debarred my presence in actuality. I smiled, reading—

"Mignonette, Mignonette,
Of all flowers the pet."

and "Indeed!" thought I, tossing my head; "but not *yours* as yet, sir!"

While I studied to disentangle the scribble, I heard breathing near me, and started to find Gogo regarding me with a cynical, half-diverted scowl. The creature walked like a cat on carpet. He had no creaking leather to betray him.

"So-ho!" growled he; "you can yet blush to be found out by your dog?"

I laughed, vexed, and a little embarrassed.

"O," said he, "never mind! I am honoured in even that little rose of shame. You won't grow it long."

"Gogo," I said, "how dare you?"

"Why," said he, "as dogs dare, who love without

respect, and see no more harm to serve a thief than a prince."

I looked at him a moment, between tears and defiance.

"You are very unkind," I said. "What is the good of my confessing anything to you, if you so distrust me?"

"Confessing?" said he, "the good? Why, because I have no legs to run away, and a man's better judgment is always in his legs. My foolish heart is nearer the ground than most. Tread on it, thou Circe; and prove me less than half Ulysses. Confess to me—confess; and I will stay, and smile—and believe."

"No," I said, recovering my confidence. "I swear not to, unless you confess first. I asked you the other day how—how you came to lose them; and you put my question by, sir, and were dreadfully rude into the bargain. Very well, I am waiting to have you atone by answering it."

I dropped into a chair, and he followed me, and squatted himself on the floor, a very abortion of passion, yet moving somehow in his grotesqueness. I kicked off my slippers, and put my feet into his hands—

"There," I said, "they are tired, Gogo. Soothe them while you talk."

He caressed the weariness from them, as gentle as a woman.

"I am at odds," he said, in a low great voice, full of emotion, "I am at odds with what remains of myself. How can I reconcile this with my loyalty to the poor inspired ape I serve, and love through serving?"

"How do you come to serve him?" I whispered, half drugged by the creature's touch. "You are cleverer than he, better educated, and all that."

"I love," he groaned, "I have always loved, to find romantic excuses for the material uglinesses of life; to get a little salt out of its offences. Who are those who say the visible form is but an expression of the individual spirit—an internal autocracy shaping itself on the surface? Poor atomists who cannot feel the pressure of

all eternity moulding them from without! Amidst sordid functions they go groping for the essence, turning blank faces to the sweet air, the sun in the trees, the far-drawn winds, the song of birds and scent of flowers, all the spirit influences which really shape us. The soul ceases at the portals of the senses. The dross it carries with it alone goes on and in. *We* are but so many obstructions in the vast harmony—foreign bodies which it is for ever striving to penetrate and decompose. It focuses its burning light upon us; it takes the swimming heavens for its lens; and we die and are dissolved into it. Only in rare instances does the process wring from us a fine frenzy, or melt us into song; and then we see genius—genius, which fools call self-issuing, but which is really spirit reflected, like heat cast back from a wall."

"You odd creature," I murmured. "You may go on, though I don't understand you a bit. Has Mr. de Crespigny been half melted into song? I shouldn't be surprised, by his appearance."

"Nor do *I* understand," he said. "I can find romance in everything external to man, but I can't pursue it into his organic tissues. Can *you* be so penetrated by it, and yet not perish, or even show one scar? I think you are immortal, woman; unless it is the genius of human beauty which you reflect, and which will presently destroy and annihilate you. Why, then, I would give my own soul to keep you soulless, you wretched, adorable child."

"Gogo!" I protested, too languid to be resentful.

"Ay!" he said, his voice hoarse with miserable passion. "Let me speak. It is all the licence I ask. I know my place, if I have grown confused about my service. What I don't know is why I, a free spirit, who have never before truckled to the flesh, should suddenly find myself bound to it, soul and honour."

He bent and kissed the foot he was caressing; then quickly sat up, and set his strong teeth.

"You ask me how I came by my hurts," he said:

"Well, listen to the story of this most laughable butt of Fortune. It is soon told."

He passed his hand across his forehead.

"It has been my doom to serve Nature; to worship her through those visible concentrations of her light upon individuals whom we call geniuses. How I discovered too late that her preferences were arbitrary, fanciful, often unworthy; that her signal gifts could be used to stultify her own creed of natural faith, natural justice, natural order, let these witness and call me fool."

He jerked up his poor stumps so comically that I could not help laughing.

"Ay," he said, "a tragic prolegomena to the history of a Dutch tumbler, isn't it? Well, for the text. It was at Oxford that I met and worshipped my first genius. He was a man of great family, an inspired naturalist, an unerring shot and rare sportsman. In those early days we had already planned an expedition together to the unexplored North Western 'Rockies,' for the purpose of making such a collection of their flora and fauna as should bring us wealth and reputation. Though the world of Nature seemed even too cramped a stage for my boundless lust of life, the prospect of those unspeakable teeming solitudes, inviting all that was most strenuous in me to conquer, was a certain solace in itself. My soul sought territory; it seeks it still; and, though I be what I am, the stars, this poor earth once subdued, still enter into my plan of campaign.

"I was not rich. When the time came, I had to realise all my capital to sail with my friend. We reached, after considerable hardships, the Athabasca territory, and thence started on our exploration westwards. I soon found that my comrade, though a genius in comparative analysis and definition, lacked the physique necessary to the task we had set ourselves. He was often ailing and querulous, and the gathering of the specimens practically devolved upon me. Still, we had

garnered and classified a considerable harvest in one of the little settlements of the Fur Company, before the accident befell which was to deprive me for ever of the fruits of my devotion. We were one day duck-shooting over a lake, when the ice broke and my friend was plunged in frozen water to the knees. His frantic cries brought me hurriedly to his assistance. By the greatest good fortune a little gravelly shallow had received us; but, inasmuch as this shelved away acutely on every side, our desperate scrambles to escape only let us into deeper water. There was nothing for it but to stay where we were till rescue could reach us from the shore, and so we set ourselves to endure. Not long, on my companion's part. He soon complained that he must die unless relieved. He was frail and spare, and I only something less than a giant. I took him first into my arms, then upon my shoulders, designing to hold him so until succour came. It reached us in the shape of some Indians from the shore, who pushed a canoe towards us over the ice. But by then I was stark frozen, and my legs to the knees insensible. By chance there was an ex-medical student in the settlement, who turned what rough knowledge of surgery was his to the best account he was able. One of my legs was mortified beyond recovery; and this he amputated. The other, after incredible suffering, was saved to me. For weeks, however, I was kept knocking at death's door; and, when at length I could creep from under the shadow, it was to the knowledge of an anguish more cruel than the other. This man, this genius, whom I had given so much to save, had deserted me while I lay stricken, and, carrying with him all the rare accumulations of our enterprise, had gone south to Vancouver. There was no message left, no consideration for me in all his vile philosophy of self-interest. It was just a case of treacherous abandonment.

"When I was sufficiently recovered, I pursued him by tedious heart-breaking stages, long months in their

accomplishment. I will not weary you, you thing of thoughtless life, with their particulars. I was sustained, and only sustained, through all by the thought of wresting from this scientific egoist an acknowledgment of my share in the practical success of our expedition. At last, poor, friendless, crippled, I ran him to earth in London. I found him there, his name writ famous in the annals of the Royal Society; himself the honoured recipient of its gold medal; his collection—*our* collection—already on view in the hallowed precincts of Crane Street.

“I faced, and upbraided him with his treachery. He retorted coldly that he had never considered me but as the servant of his enterprise, useless to it when once, through my own folly, disabled. I found a friend, and the affair made a little stir. To my accusations he answered that he had employed, but had been forced to discard me, through the irregularity of my habits. Outraged beyond words, I challenged him; he accepted, and we met at Richmond. His first shot, aimed with diabolical ingenuity, shattered the bones of my sound knee; and, in the result, the limb had to be amputated above. When I was discharged from the hospital, it was to find the exhibition closed, the town empty, and myself thrust upon it, a helpless, destitute hulk.

“The friend I have mentioned, humorous and good-natured, came to my assistance. He commanded some pale interest at Court. By means of it, he procured me, as an expert naturalist, the post of Royal Ratcatcher, in succession to a Mr. Gower, who had lately filled the office at a yearly salary of one hundred pounds. The royal economy, however, docked me, as only two-thirds of a man, of a third of the sum. I wore a uniform of scarlet and yellow worsted, with emblematic figures of rats destroying wheat-sheaves embroidered on it; and in this I stood, the laughing-stock of the maids of honour, for three years.

“At the end of that time, having had the misfortune to overlook a rat which had made its nest in a pair of the

Duke of Cumberland's state breeches, I was dismissed without a character. Again I applied to my friend, and was recommended by him, for my scientific attainments, to a French nobleman, who was troubled by the croaking of frogs in his ponds, and employed me to whip the water all night with a long wand of willow that his rest might be undisturbed. But the constant immersion rotting my stumps, and he refusing to supply me with others, I was obliged to resign my post, and returned to England.

"In the meantime, my friend had died of a humour, and I was stranded entirely without resources. For some time I earned a precarious livelihood, in my naturalist character, by worming dogs; and again, one still more precarious, by cleansing ladies' *toupées* of the vermin which long usage engendered in them. It was here, while serving my master, a wig-maker, that chance brought me acquainted with my present manner of service.

"During all this time, I will say, I had never ceased to regard soul as external to form, or to scout that introspection which is the real unhappiness. What did it concern me, if I was destroying rats, or picking fleas out of a poodle? In any case, I was helping Nature to its freer manifestations on matter, and, in my constant communion with it, prepared to welcome such rare accidents of genius as might come my way. My master's business brought him into frequent relations with the theatre; and it was thus that I first encountered de Crespigny, who was at the time acting scene-painter to the new house at Sadler's Wells. I had no sooner had the chance to see his work than I recognised genius, glaring and manifest. He did wonders in a few touches, that he might idle for an hour. My opportunity was come, and I entreated him to employ me, in however menial a capacity. He was touched by my enthusiasm; flattered, perhaps, by my admiration; persuaded by my strength. He engaged me, first as his assistant; soon as his nurse and mentor. For years I have helped to

direct his career, have goaded his inspirations, cossetted his weaknesses. Ah, child! He is *my* child, made glorious by my faith in him. Do not seduce me from my allegiance to my child, and for the first time make me out of love with Nature!"

He ended with a groan, and flung himself prostrate on the floor, beating, I think, his forehead against it.

"Poor Gogo!" I said. "You have confessed; and so will I now. He is my child too. I adore him, and am so ravished by his art that I could not rest with thinking what he had made of the portrait. Do you know, Gogo? I will tell you the truth. I was hunting for the key of the press when you came in and caught me."

He lay, without answering.

"Won't you lend it me, Gogo?" I coaxed softly.

"Thank God," he muttered, raising his head, "I am tied from the temptress. It is not in my power, thou Circe. He always carries it with him."

XI

I ADD THE LAST TOUCH TO A PORTRAIT

THAT same night, while undressing, with my room door open for the heat, I suddenly thought I distinguished an unwonted footstep on the landing below me, from which Patty's little chamber led. I listened, quite still, for some moments; then, the stealthy sounds seeming to recede into the hall and thence die away, descended cat-footed to the landing, and, after hearkening an instant, opened her door swiftly and noiselessly upon my friend. Instantly I knew that the amazed suspicion which had sprung upon my heart was justified. The child stood before me, terror in her startled eyes, her dark hair falling upon her shoulders, a brush in one hand, a paper in the other.

"Diana!" she gasped, in a whisper. "What do you want?"

"Has he been with you?" I asked instantly, leaving her no time to prevaricate.

"*With* me!" she exclaimed, so scandalised and incredulous that the worst of my qualm was laid on the spot.

Without another word I held out my hand. Without a word she put the paper into it. I took it, and read—

"Mignonette, Mignonette,
Of all flowers the pet,"—

("O, shameful!" I whispered, and set my lips.)

"O, beautiful, beautiful, sweet Mignonette!
Dear, kind little blossom,
Soft, soft in the bosom,
Who gives to thee, takes from thee, sweet Mignonette?"

Was it thou at her ear that shed sweets passing by me?
Is it thou in her shape, or herself that doth fly me?
Is it thou, is it she, Mignonette, Mignonette,

That I follow, must follow,
As the Summer the Spring,
Who hides warm in the wing
Of its darling the swallow?

As love chases the swallow
To the eaves and the leaves
High up under the roof,
Mignonette, so I follow.
Ah! to whose little chamber,
Sweetheart?

As I clamber,
I trow not, I know not
What dream flew before to the room high aloof.
But my heart pants delight
In the thought, half a fright,
Half delirious sweetness,
That the spirit of the flower,
That the spirit of the hour
Shall reveal love's completeness."

She was as pale as death and trembling all over as I looked up. For the moment my heart withered to her. The shock, the outrage was unendurable.

"Who wrote this?" I demanded, in a hoarse whisper. She did not answer.

"Speak," I said. "How did it come to you?"

"I heard it slipped under the door," she muttered.

"By him? O, you little traitor and wanton!"

She fell on her knees, sobbing and clinging to me in a soft anguish of desperation.

"O, my dear, don't look at me so! I'm not untrue to you. I never imagined it was me—no, not for one moment—till to-night."

"And you are shocked, no doubt, to find your precious virtue at fault. O, you little serpent that I have trusted and warmed in my bosom!"

"Diana!" she wept, in a very frenzy of despair. "O, what can I say or do? I thought it was you. It shall be you, Diana!"

"Yes, it shall be me," I answered, "but no thanks to you. Don't think that this is anything but a passing

mood of his, played upon you for my delectation because I have been cold to him of late."

"I think it is, I know it is," she said, brightening.

"And you hope it is, I daresay," I said scornfully.

"Yes, indeed," she answered. "There is no love in the world but yours that I care for, Diana!"

"Love!" I exclaimed. "Don't flatter this poor half-breeched makeshift with the sentiment."

But I looked down on her more kindly, with a vexed laugh. My good-humour was returning to me. It seemed too comical, the way we three pious spinsters were scrambling for the favour of a sheep's-eyes. A pair of small-clothes flung into our nunnery had been worse than an apple of discord. Skirts were so *de rigueur* with us, that I think even Gogo's wooden legs seemed a little *outrés*.

"I do believe you were innocent, in everything but your cuddlesome looks," I said, relenting.

"O yes, Diana!" she answered eagerly. "And I can't help them."

"Would you if you could?" I questioned doubtfully. "I don't know. There is a good deal of method in artlessness. It can always plead itself in excuse for enjoying the pleasures which we sinners must take at the expense of our consciences."

She knelt at my feet, silently fondling and kissing my hands.

"Are you sure you don't regret giving him up?" I asked.

"Quite—sure," she answered, so faintly as to set me off laughing.

"There, Patty *mia*," I said; "you are not to be sacrificed to a self-indulgent vapours. You will see some day how kind I am being to you; and you shall have a large family yet." And with that I kissed and left her, taking the paper with me.

I will admit that the shock to my vanity was for the moment acute, until reflection came to convince me that this rickety light-o'-love, wearying of his one day's

abstinence, and finding me inaccessible, had only palmed off on my friend the reversion of sentiments inspired by me. On further reflection, too, I was not the more angry upon realising that I had acquired a useful weapon for goading him to a definite decision upon an action long deferred—our flight together, that is to say, and, when once emancipated from the stunting influences of Wellcot, the union which, it was understood, was to be conditional on his satisfying me that his ambitions and mine were mutually accommodating partners. But now, if for no other reason, I felt that I owed it to my affection for my poor little friend to precipitate this step, lest she should be led, through her natural incapacity for denying anyone, to making herself miserable for life; and so, armed with my *pièce de conviction*, I ended by sleeping very soundly and comfortably.

I did not even hesitate the next morning, but, about noon, singing very cheerfully to myself, descended to Mr. de Crespigny's studio. The door was locked. "Open, please," I said.

"Go away," he answered crossly. "I'm at work on the portrait."

"Yes?" I said; "but I want to come in."

Perhaps there was something in my tone. Anyhow, after a short interval, during which I heard him wheeling his easel about, he unlocked the door himself. I marched straight in, and, quite radiant, nodded to Gogo, who, busy in a corner, gazed at me with a sort of gloomy alarm.

"Mayn't I look?" I said, smiling.

"No!" said de Crespigny sharply.

I went and held the paper under his nose.

"Didn't you slip this under the wrong door last night?" I asked calmly.

"There!" growled Gogo, and throwing down his tools faced about furiously.

De Crespigny's face went mottled, and he began to shake all over. Then suddenly he rallied, and flamed on me, stuttering.

"Wha-what right have you to ask? I may address whom I like, without requesting your leave. My-my lady shall be informed what spies she's got in her house."

"You ass!" roared Gogo.

"From me—yes," I said. "I'm going straight to tell her."

Gogo stumped fiercely, and put himself between me and the door. His master collapsed like a pricked bladder.

"You'll ruin yourself," he gasped, between tears and bullying. "If you ruin me, you come down too—don't forget that."

"O, in a noble cause!" I said mockingly: "to open the eyes of my mistress and my friend."

He stamped about in a little impotent frenzy, then came and almost prostrated himself before me.

"I—I thought you'd forsaken me," he cried; "I swear I did, Di; and—and I was as miserable as a dog, and wanted sympathy, I did, in this cursed strait-laced nunnery. Don't tell on me—don't; and I'll go on with your picture here and now."

In a fever of trepidation, he hurried from me, calling on me not to go, and fetched the canvas from the press and brought it to me.

"See," he said, "you little injured innocent—yes, you was quite right to be hurt; but—but it's you I love, Di—it really is—and"—

The canvas fell from his hand. He stood, gaping, as if in the first shock of a stroke. And I turned; and there was madam standing in our midst, every atom of colour gone from her face.

There are some situations, my Alcide, that can only be ended brutally. I don't know what deadly instinct drove me to the portrait; but to it I ran, and turned it with the easel about. Then, I declare, I felt as if I had committed murder. The wretch, with what fatal purpose I could not tell, had done nothing less than mutilate his own inspiration. In place of the lovely roses of yesterday

was the worn, haggard woman of to-day, and the harp in her lap was a tangle of broken strings.

I felt for her. Looking in her face, I almost repented my part. There was a dreadful smile on it, as she went very quiet and breathless, and lifted the "Una" from the ground.

"It is very pretty," she said, "but hardly proper to a child of the Good Shepherd."

Then I hated her as I had never done before, and rejoiced in her downfall.

"I was looking for you, Diana," she said, in her straitened tones, "and heard your voice here. Will you come with me, please?"

And so she went out, deigning not one look at that insult of her own face, nor one word to the hangdog perpetrator of it. She went out, as cold as ice, and I saw Gogo, standing by the door, droop his head as she passed. Tingling with the joy of battle, I followed her. I knew that my long martyrdom was nearing its end.

Outside in the hall she turned to me, quite stiff—I wondered how her limp corsets could support so much dignity—and bade me retire to my room till she should send for me.

"And if it is to find you on your knees," she said, "why, by so much will the duty I have to perform be made the easier."

Well, to do her justice, I believe that her heart was as near broken as one can be.

"Thank you, ma'am," I answered. "Do you want to flog me? 'Twould scarce improve your case, I think, with Mr. de Crespigny."

I ran up lightly, humming to myself. I heard her give a little gasp, and then go on her way to the parlour. Nobody came near me while I waited, until, in a little while, a servant knocked, to summon me. I went down at once, as jaunty as you please. Father Pope was with her, I saw, as I entered the room.

"I wonder how much of the truth she has told him?" I thought.

She was seated, perfectly colourless, while her companion stood, lowering and uneasy, by a table hard by. She bent a little forward, drawing her breath, I fancied, with difficulty, and addressed me at once.

"You have asked pardon of God, I hope?"

I tossed my head.

"For what, madam? What have I done?"

She appealed to the priest, with a little momentary helpless gesture; then bit her thin lips, as if stung by his silent perversity to resolution.

"For the deceit you have long practised on us," she said.

"O, madam," I answered, "do you refer to the gentleman's attentions to me? I could hardly be so immodest as to confess of them to you, when I did not even know to what end they were advanced."

She held up her hand dully.

"I allude to your privately sitting to him for—for that—for his model," she said.

"Why, I had my respected example, madam," said I. "I didn't know but what we were expected to accommodate the gentleman, seeing you yourself gave us the lead."

She rose quickly, striking her hand on the table.

"To make of yourself, pledged to Heaven, a shame and a wanton in his eyes! O, 'twas infamous!—Not that," she checked herself hurriedly, "I blame him—not altogether. Art is a strange creditor, that makes demands, scarce comprehensible to us, upon those who practise it. But, *you*"—

"Are you blaming *me*, madam," I cried, "because he has not paid *you* to your liking?"

She turned away, as if quite sick. Father Pope took up the tale.

"Silence!" he roared, "you little dirty liar and trollop!"

"O, no doubt!" I piped him back, "because I rejected *your* attentions."

He took a step forward, his great fist clenched, his

glasses blazing. I don't know how he might not have forgotten himself, had not Lady Sophia come quickly between.

"Hush!" she said. "It is all to end here, Father." She turned quietly on me. "Father Pope is, I am sorry to say, justified. You have deceived us in more things than one, Diana. It is not so long, I must tell you, since I heard from the Sisters of les Madelonnettes that your original story of your unhappy mother's death was false, she having but a few months ago returned penitent and broken to die in the very convent she had so shamed and disgraced."

I gazed at her, bewildered, for an instant, and then, as the truth penetrated me, with a horror and passion beyond control.

"O," I cried, "this is too much! And I believed her long dead of grief; and you never told me—never let me see her: and I think you are the wickedest woman in the world!"

She stood staring at me, silent, as if stricken.

"*Cave anguem!*" sneered the priest, with a brutal laugh.

I turned upon the pale woman with a furious stamp.

"Why did you never let me know? How dared you keep it from me? I will go to law about it and have you hanged!"

"If I could have thought"—she began, in a whisper; "if I have by chance done wrong"—

"Wrong!" I cried violently, "you have done me nothing but wrong since I came here. You have always misunderstood and disbelieved in me; and now, it seems, you had no right to adopt me at all."

I ended with a torrent of tears.

"I want to leave you," I sobbed; "I want to go away into the convent, and be at peace where no one can hate and slander me."

"Ha!" said Father Pope, moving, and hunching his shoulders, "then there our wishes jump, and no time like the present. So go collect your duds."

"Diana!" whispered madam again, in her stunned way, and made a little movement towards me. But I shrunk from her, shivering.

"No, don't touch me—*please*," I said. "I'll go to the Sisters, who'll be kind to me. I'll do anything you want—only not stop here."

I saw her put her hand to her heart as I tottered from the room. Then I ran upstairs, and hurried to put some little properties together.

I quite acquiesced in the movement—was eager to hasten it, in fact. The truth is, that, of Wellcot and the convent, the latter appeared to me by far the less formidable as a present asylum. Any further meeting here between me and Noel was rendered virtually impossible; nor was it likely that the outraged spinster would prove so accommodating to our purposes as the artless little fatties across the valley. One need have no fear of being buried alive in a dovecot.

While I was hastily collecting a few necessities, my sweet girl crept in, and made a little sweet nuisance of herself, distressing and impeding me.

"There, dearest," I said, as I wrought preoccupied, "you are the best of loving chickens, and I shall have plenty of use for you by and by. Only at present—there, don't pout—I am too jubilant in the prospect of escape to cling and kiss and cry with you. I'm not going to Land's End, only across the way; and mind, no more communications from a certain gentleman, miss, unless on my behalf."

She promised, with new floods of tears.

"Then," I said, pushing her playfully away, "find me my vinaigrette, child. Father Pope is going to convey me in the carriage."

XII

I AM INFAMOUSLY RETALIATED ON

I REMEMBER once dining in Sorrento with the Marquis de P——, a most exclusive sybarite and dilettante. The table was spread with a flesh silk damask, whose very touch was a caress. Before each of the company—a small and appreciative one—was placed one iridescent Venetian goblet, and a bunch of lavender in a floss silk napkin—nothing else whatever. The room—vaulted into Moorish arabesques, and swimming with a slumberous half-penetrable light, in which the crusted gold of stalactites, high in the groining, alloyed and confused itself with the stain from purple windows—gave upon a dusky pillared court, where zithers and the plash of a fountain wedded in soft music, and the breath of orange blossoms made us a dim impalpable barrier against the world. The plates were served each ready charged, and each with a golden spoon only; for knives were not to be allowed to sever this dream of sensuous rumination. There was but a single wine—the Château Yquem, which is reserved for the nobility of its district, and which never goes beyond but in a few favoured directions. We talked but little and idly, with a mingling of delicious sighs and happy low laughter. Towards the end the zithers ceased; the remote fountain tinkled alone; and a girl, a ghost of loveliness, danced and wreathed herself without in a flood of moonlight. It was all perfect satisfaction without surfeit. Of such is the kingdom of heaven. And yet there are times when I wonder if my host has gone to join Lazarus or Dives. *Mon ami*, I am often full of

such wonders ; and then sometimes—when, perhaps, I have not kept the perfect proportion, and my head aches—I think I will end my days in a convent, and purify my wicked digestion on lentils and spring water. Only, where is the convent? I have seen some in my day, and in not one have they cultivated their little paradise on cabbages. I find myself standing aghast on that neutral ground between the world and the Church ; and, alas ! there are so many other nice people standing there to keep me company. With such, this desert itself becomes an Eden, and on either side I cannot escape from it but into another.

The Convent of Perpetual Invocation received me with open arms from my morose jailer. It conducted me, in the person of its Mother, to the sunny parlour, and there sleeked and patted me fondly.

“You dear,” she said. “I am so glad we have got you at last.”

Her coif looked as if she had slept in it, and her plump hands were by no means over clean. She was a stumpy, beaming little woman, moist with good living. Her skin worked so freely, and in such prosperous folds, it might have made a dyspeptic sigh with envy. I felt at home with her directly.

“There, dear,” she said, “you have brought us many good things in your time, but none so good as yourself ; and now we take you in pledge of better.”

It may have been meant as a little sly spiritual reflection, but she smacked her ripe lips over it as if she already tasted in me, as madam’s direct protégée, a very plethora of venison and larded fowls. For many years, I believe, these good little women had been secretly looking forward to the term of my novitiate as their gastronomic millennium. I could laugh, I declare, with remorse to think how the dear pink little pigs were defrauded.

I had been delivered without directions, but with a surly intimation that madam would call on the morrow. It was not my business to enlighten any-

one; and so I enjoyed the best of my present favour.

She trotted me out by and by to see her asparagus and strawberry beds, fat in promise, though tucked now and slumbering under their autumn blankets of manure; her hives; her mushroom pits; her stewpond thick with fat carps stuffed up to the neck and something her own shape; her pigeon cotes and rabbit hutches. There was an odd family likeness, a general assimilation to the neckless, apoplectic type amongst them all—Sisters, animals, and vegetables. Perpetual invocation, it was evident, had an obliterating effect on the individual. I shifted my own dimpled shoulders. How long would they be rounding to the contour of these squat little vessels? I thought with a certain terror of my admirable digestion, and determined as long as I remained here to live sparely. What if, like the wolf in the fable, I were to eat so many fat pancakes that I could not escape through the hole in the wall again!

That evening we had a refection of sweet bread and fruit and prayers, and a delightful supper (alas for my resolution!) and comfortable droning prayers again. Then we went each to her cosy cell, which was like a crib for a fat baby, and slept the round of the clock to prayers and breakfast. My fellow-sisters delighted me. I never saw such a community of bow-windows, the most comfortable little parlours one could imagine for the spirit to be entertained in. They had their scapulars made very large, and of flannel, so as to serve the double purpose of tokens and liver pads. At meals we were forbidden to talk—a most fattening proscription, or prescription. Prayer, at all seasons or out of them, was the single ordinance of the society—perpetual invocation on behalf of our unenlightened land. We were safe, perhaps, in not considering the logical result of its efficacy, or, indeed, the prospect of a second reformation might have frightened us into heresy. For, our point once gained, our occupation would be gone, and our creed of self-content be called upon to vindicate

itself very likely in self-denial. However, England as yet was far from recanting its heresy of prosperity-worship. Our very fatness was the best argument in the world to it of our right to survive; so it showed no tendency to do other than keep us eternally praying for it.

Madam drove over on the day following my arrival, and was closeted for a considerable time with the Mother. I was not summoned to her presence, but I think she did not dare to vent her full heart of spleen upon me in her report. She could not very well, without compromising herself. She must have revealed, or intimated, however, so much as give the poor woman a hopelessly bewildered impression of my personal contribution to art. For the rest, I think she was satisfied with having scotched her terrible little snake, and did not doubt that, having done so, my own sense of final commitment to my calling would keep me immured out of harm's way, and hers, to the end of time. It must have been with a feeling of guilty relief that she drove back to conclusions with her innamorato.

The Mother, having sent for me on her withdrawal, looked at me with the most cherubic doubt and dread, and pressed my hand quite speechless.

"Dear," she whispered, all of a sudden, "so very *décolletée*! and think of the draughts!"

"Why more than the angels?" I said, pouting. "They don't wear underclothes."

"They are symbols," she answered doubtfully. "Besides, we don't know."

"O, *ma mère*!" I cried. "What's the good of being an angel, if one has to?"

"Hush!" she said. "Anyhow, they may take liberties denied to us. Besides, this young person was not an angel."

"There you are wrong," I cried. "She was an angel of purity."

"Is that so?" she asked a little curiously. "Well, it makes a difference, of course. But it would have been

more becoming of her to be painted by a woman. There is the respectable Madame Kauffmann, for instance, who, I am told, depicts religion and the virtues. But there, dear, we will say no more about it; only pray to the good Father, now the naughty little episode's over, that we may be accepted meekly into His fold."

I heard no more from Wellcot after this for a couple of days, and was beginning already to torment myself with qualms of jealousy of my sweet little vicegerent there, being at the last almost driven to break out and precipitate matters, when I was saved by a call from the darling herself. Our meeting, to which the Mother's presence gave a conventual sanction, though fond and cordial, would have been barren of result had not my friend, with a finesse which delighted me, and the more because I had thought her incapable of it, rid us of our incumbrance.

"Good lud!" said she, after the first embrace, twinkling through her tears, "if I haven't left my little basket of cream cheeses for the Sisters melting outside in the sun!"

The bait took instant. The Mother, with a little gentle reproof for her carelessness, waddled out with such a benevolent glare as though she had heard the last trump.

"Wait, dears, and I'll be with you again!" said she.

The moment she was gone, Patty threw herself upon me.

"I hid it under some bushes," she said, "just to keep her hunting, and where it wouldn't melt really."

Her second reason was characteristic enough. She could never offer the tiniest hurt from one hand without its remedy from the other. I foresaw she'd whip her children by and by with a strap of healing-plaister, the poor little weak creature.

"O, you *naughty* little thing!" I giggled; but was serious the next moment, questioning and urging her.

"Quick!" I said. "What's he going to do? Have you a letter?"

She shook her head.

"He'll have a postchaise outside in a night or two, and will let you know; but for the moment he's watched, and daren't move, or commit himself to paper."

"The hero! He's still there, then, at Wellcot? If it had been me, I'd have had my servants flog him out of the house."

"O, Diana! How can you say such a thing, and you in love with him!"

"Whom I love I chasten. I'm in love, like Mrs. Sophia, with myself through him. He's going to make me great. Now, tell me what's the state of things there."

She shook her head rather piteously.

"I don't know. It's all very sad and lonely without you. I think she wants to forgive him; but he's proud and angry, and holds aloof."

I turned up my nose with a sniff.

"It's nicer to be a healthy sinner. Her fulsomeness makes me sick. And how did you get leave to come and see me?"

"I didn't get leave at all," she said. "I daren't even ask it, feeling sure she'd refuse. I slipped out without telling, hearing cook had something to send. I expect she'll be very angry when she hears."

"If she hears," I corrected her.

She looked at me with sad, puzzled eyes, the comical dear.

"How shall I ever bear with it all after you are gone, Diana?" she said. "You'll let me come and stay with you sometimes, when you're married?"

"Now, Patty," I said, "tell me the truth. Is the creature still making eyes at you?"

"No," she answered stoutly; then added, conscience-stricken, "At least, I don't know. I never look at him. But—but—O, Diana! I wish he'd go altogether, and leave us, you and me, as we were."

"That's perhaps not a very kind wish, child," said I. "But you shall come and stay with us when once

I've got him under control, never fear." Then, as I heard the step of the Mother returning, "Hush!" I whispered; "tell him I've no idea of being buried alive here: that he must arrange it very quickly, or I shall return and give everything away."

She answered silently, with a hug and a gush of tears. She looked haggard and distraught, poor little wretch; yet I had no alternative but to use her.

I waited two days longer, in an anxiety that rose to distraction. Still no message came from him; and at last I made up my mind, and sent him an upbraiding letter by a misbegotten old beldame, with a leery eye, who helped in the convent laundry. She brought me back an answer—that he would be waiting for me, with a postchaise, in the lane without, at nine o'clock that very night. O, my friend! how dreadful is the first realisation of perfidy in those whom our inexperience trusts! This cursed Hecate was all the time in the pay of the authorities whom my innocence thought to hoodwink. When the time came, I wondered, indeed, to find Fortune so blind in my interest. So far seemed there from being the least suggestion of suspicion, of uneasiness abroad, chance appeared to invite me with open portals. What Sisters I encountered, even the Mother herself, manœuvred, I could have thought, to leave me my way unobstructed. Miserable parasites of power, subordinating their consciences to the lusts of their abominable little stomachs! To pamper those, they were lending themselves without scruple to a deed of unutterable darkness—the consigning of their innocent sister to a living death.

I found the chaise waiting in a dusk corner beneath trees. A cloaked and sombre figure, engaging me in the shadow, hurried me within, leapt after, slammed the door, and gave the word to proceed. In a moment we were tearing through the night.

So great was the flurry of my nerves, I had not, until the lamp at the convent gate flashed upon us and was gone, noticed that we were four in company.

Then, all at once, I started. The man who sat beside me had removed his hat and was wiping his brow. Two thick-set, motionless figures sat facing me.

"Easy done, sir," said one of these.

"Ha!" said my companion, "yes."

In a sudden terror, I struggled to rise. He restrained me.

"Mr. de Crespigny!" I exclaimed.

"Ha!" said my companion again. "You hear that, Willing?"

"I hear," responded the second of the others gruffly.

My companion turned to me suavely.

"Mr. de Crespigny?" he said. "Yes, and what about him, madam?"

"You are not he!" I cried wildly. "Let me out! He was to have met me!"

With a sort of tacit understanding, they all hemmed me in with their knees, imprisoning and controlling me at once.

"You make a mistake, madam," said my captor. "He was not to have met you. But, be reconciled; time and judicious treatment, I have not the least doubt, will cure you of this delusion."

In an instant the whole horror of this snare, of this most wicked scheme, opened like a black gulf before my eyes. The convent—to anticipate an analogy—had been my Elba; now my St. Helena was to be an asylum. She had discovered; or he, the dastard, had betrayed me; and, in the result, she had not hesitated, with the connivance of some sycophant doctor, to stoop to this.

It was night; the chaise drove on by back ways; I sunk back, sick and almost senseless, and abandoned myself to despair.

XIII

I AM WOODED TO SELF-DESTRUCTION

DR. PEEL'S Asylum was known generically as "The House," perhaps in cynical allusion to its licensed irresponsibility to any laws but its own. It was conceived on the principle of an eel-pot—the easiest thing to slip, or be driven, into; the hardest to escape from. It was not so much an asylum as an oubliette; never so much a house of correction as of annihilation. There, in addition to the constitutionally weak-minded, troublesome heirs, irreclaimable prodigals, jealous wives, importunate creditors, distinguished blackmailers, chance recipients of deadly secrets—all such, in fact, as threatened the peace of that grand seigniorship which has a prescriptive monopoly in it—could be immured by *lettre de cachet* (it amounted to nothing less) from any accommodating physician, and afterwards "treated," or disposed of, by private contract. Its methods were delicate, tasteful, and exceedingly sure. With rib-breaking, starvation, strait-waistcoats, all the vulgar apparatus of the ordinary *médecin de fous*, it had no commerce. Where the removal of undesirables was in question, it rather killed with kindness; suffocated, like Heliogabalus, with roses; persuaded to the happy despatch with a silken cord. It drove its poor Judases to suicide by putting by, as useless, their moral reparations, and took care to have at hand the seductive means. If one escaped—a rare occurrence—it possessed a kennel of highly trained bloodhounds, whose belling warned the dark nights with menace. It asked no

questions, and expected to be asked none. Its formula was a hint and a cheque.

The asylum *ménage* was perfectly refined, and its cuisine lavish. It entertained none but the nominees of the wealthy. The extensive grounds of the house were a literal maze of beauty, the shrubberies being so disposed as to preclude all thought of restraint. It was only upon piercing them, at any point, that one found oneself opposed by a high boundary wall, which contained between itself and the estate it enclosed a waste interval incessantly patrolled, day and night, by the asylum watch. Then, indeed, one realised the iron hand in the velvet glove, and started back dismayed from the grin of the nearest sentry whom one's movements had called light-footed to the spot.

"A fine view, mum," he might say, stepping up between ingratulatory and insolent. "Was you looking for anything?"

Whereupon one would do best to retire, and precipitately; because there was no appeal from any brutality offered, in his own domain, by any servant of, or partner in, this lawless oligarchy.

Rising from my little bed, and mattresses full of fragrance and down, on the morning first after my arrival—rising, fevered and exhausted, to the full realisation of my awful position, my eyes encountered the vision of a wholesome, even luxurious, little chamber, and through an unbarred window a most heavenly prospect. I could hardly believe in the reality of my fate. This was no prison, but an inn, to escape from which it seemed only necessary to pay the score, and have the landlord cry "Bon voyage!" I remembered him the night before—a little tough, square man, drily courteous in manner, with the head and depressed forehead of a burglar. He had been already on the steps to receive me, when we drove up, standing in a patch of light with an expression on his face as if we had caught him in the act of breaking into his own premises. Those we had reached, within two hours of my first kidnapping, by

dark and devious roads. They stood, remote from all other homesteads, a little colony self-contained, some six miles south of Shole.

On the way thither I had soon abandoned all thought of resistance, or of appeal to my captors. They may have heard my sobs and prayers with a certain emotion : virtuous distress had no chance to prevail with cupidity. I sunk into a sullen apathy, my heart smouldering with rage, principally against the craven who had either betrayed me to this living death, or, at least, had weakly acquiesced in my doom. The prospect of revenge, though alternating with despair, alone preserved me from a condition of the last prostration. And in this state I was driven up to the House, and to it consigned, the sold slave of madness.

In the first terror, with staring eyes, a storm in my breast that would not rise and break, dishevelled hair, and, it may be, a look of the part I was called upon to play, I shrunk into a corner of the room into which I was introduced, and stood there panting. Dr. Peel went into a thin chuckle of laughter, curiously small and inward from so thick-set a frame.

"Brava!" said he. "Very well observed, madam! But, if you will look round, you will see there are no bolts, no bars, no locks here, save as the ordinary appurtenances of a domestic household."

There were not, indeed, to the common view. To most doors, as I came to discover, the locks were inside; and, where it was otherwise, it was—mark this!—to insure from any chance insane attack, especially at night, the lives of those which it was particularly desired should be preserved. To be given the full freedom of the House was always a significant privilege, implying, as it did, one of two things: either that the proprietor had accepted at the outset a round sum down for one's perpetual incarceration, or a hint that one's accidental removal would be handsomely acknowledged by those interested.

Now, as I said, waking on that first morning to free

prospects, my spirit experienced a rebound to the most delightful reassurance. Surely, I thought, no worse harm could be designed me than the punishment implied in my enforced temporary detention in this charming home, where, it seemed likely, a nominal deprivation of one's liberty was used to convey a gentle moral or adorn a kindly tale of reproof. I waxed jubilant. If a meek acquiescence in my fate delayed to move my jailers to liberate me, I was confident that my wits would soon find me a way to free myself from so indulgent a thralldom. And in the meantime I would resign myself to the enjoyment of a very novel experience.

A loud bell summoned us all to breakfast, *à la table d'hôte*, in a pleasant refectory. Dr. Peel took the head of the table, and a plenty of attentive lackeys waited. There was no restriction, nor interference with one's individual tastes. I accepted silently the place assigned me between a gaunt, supernaturally solemn gentleman, with mended clothes, a wigless head, and prominent fixed eyes, and the tiniest, most conceited-looking creature with humped shoulders I have ever seen. An uproarious gabble of conversation, interspersed with occasional hoots and groans, accompanied the meal throughout. Occasionally my solemn neighbour would turn to me and remark, fiercely, as though daring a contradiction, "Enough is as good as a feast; but more than enough is less than nothing."

On the third repetition of this formula, the little man on my other side addressed me with an ill-tempered chuckle—

"Bring him down, ma'am, bring him down, or the creature will scorch his head in the moon."

While I was shrinking back in confusion, Dr. Peel bent to the solemnity.

"Captain," says he, with an ingratiatory grin, "you're drinking nothing."

"I don't want anything," said the other, in a loud, bullying voice.

"Nonsense," answered the doctor. "You must keep up your character. Here, John."

He spoke to a lackey, who was ready on the moment with a decanter. To my amazement, the man filled up the gentleman's breakfast cup with raw brandy.

He shifted, glared, hesitated, and caught up the pungent stuff.

"Enough is as good as a feast, but more than enough is less than nothing," howled he, and swallowed the fire at a draught.

He had hardly consumed it, when he cast the cup into splinters on the board, staggered to his feet, and, moaning to himself, left the room. The conversation died down for a moment, and was instantly resumed more recklessly than ever. I felt suddenly sick.

"He-he!" sniggered my little companion. "He's been long taking his hint, the fool, and outstaying his welcome. But Peel's done it at last, I do believe."

I did not ask him what. My spirit felt engulfed in deep waters of terror. I sat dumb and shivering, till the meal ended, and the company broke up and dispersed itself about the grounds. Many, rude, curious, fantastic, came about me to inquire, mockingly or fulsomely, into my malady. To all their solicitations my little companion, who had appropriated me, turned a rough shoulder and rougher tongue.

"The lady has confided her case to me, you pestilent cranks!" he screamed, and succeeded in extricating and conveying me to a remoter part of the grounds. On the way we encountered two men, like gamekeepers, carrying a ghastly sheet-covered burden on a litter.

"Ho-ho!" said my friend, stopping. "It was arranged for the tower, was it?"

"Now, lookee here, Jimmy," said one of the carriers, while the two paused for a moment, "you're too precious fond of poking your nose where you ain't wanted, you are. You go along to your games, and leave your elders to theirs till you're growed up."

"Grown up!" screeched my companion, whose chin, indeed, was thick with a grey bristle, "grown up, you puppy, you calf, you insolent lout!"

Crazy in a moment, he danced in the path, screaming and shaking his fists. The men resumed their way, laughing. Suddenly he caught himself to a sort of reason, white and shaking.

"They want to drive me to it," he said. "They want me to break a blood-vessel; but I see through them, and I won't be drawn."

He wiped his forehead, and looked anxiously up in my face.

"You see it, don't you?" he said. "The fools are envious of my inches. But you ain't, are you, being a woman?"

"No, no," I said, smiling, in a sort of ghastly spasm, in full understanding of his mania. "No, no; or should I select you for my champion in this? Let us go on, *please*. Was that—?"

"Yes," he answered, the question that my fainting spirit shrunk from formulating, "yes, it was the Captain—good riddance to a conceited ass."

He strutted along, pluming himself on my praise. All that I have stated—the truth about this smiling, damned Gehenna—I drew from him then or thereafter. I cannot recall it now without a shudder like death's.

Once that morning we came, in a retired corner, upon the prettiest, greenest graveyard—the sweetest God's-acre, God pity it! in all the sad world. It was studded with quiet flowers, screened with fragrant shrubs, thick with graves, *each a nameless grassy barrow*. What depth of tragedy in it all! I cannot, I vow, dwell any longer on the picture, but must cover the details of it at a gallop.

I was nine weeks, before I found release, in this appalling hell—a time the most stupendous of my life. I will acquit the Lady Sophia of intending the worst; I cannot acquit her of implying it. Whether from jealousy, or a true conviction as to the unpardonable nature of my recreancy, she failed, at least, to assure the instruments of her cruelty that my death-sentence was not intimated in the bond. It is possible she may have been totally ignorant of the real character of the

place to which she condemned me. She is none the less responsible [for the conclusions the Rhadamanthus of that inferno elected to draw from her dubiety. Anyhow, I am convinced that my destruction was designed, before I had been there many days.

In the meantime—O, my Alcide, pity thy Diane! What had she done to merit this fate, the most awful that could befall a brilliant sanity? Very, very soon that early buoyancy was like nothing but the memory of a bright star, that had exploded and scattered as soon as realised. A sickness, a deadly apprehension, took its place; a sense of some creeping, circumventing terror, which hemmed me in, stealthy and pitiless, concentrating my thoughts on a single point in this cursed paradise. I was inoculated with the disease of the morbid intellects about me. My reason suffered deliberate contamination by the remorseless ghoul my keeper. No fewer than three times during my short sojourn in his inferno did the corpse of a self-destroyer witness to the success of his methods. They went to swell the bloody tally of shrouds under the grass in the little graveyard; and, thinking of them there, their awful waiting testimony, I would look up to find the evil eye of their murderer fixed upon me in covert, lustful speculation.

For long I remained incredulous that my wit could be utterly impotent to devise a means to escape. Gradually, only, the sinister watchfulness which guarded every outlet of this green prison, and the fiendish incorruptibility of its warders, was bitten into my brain. Pleas and graces were accepted for nothing but an encouragement to unwelcome attentions, indeed. It was not supposed that one could be insane and modest. Many sold their virtue for a little surcease from tyranny, bartered their dearer than life for a poor extension of living. At the same time, and for the same reason, a most rigid embargo was placed on all communications with the outside world. Worse than a Russian censorship doomed these utter exiles from hope.

In the worst of my despair I had written to Patty, to de Crespigny, begging them to intercede for me with the cruel woman, who yet *could* not be aware of the inhuman character of her revenge. Finally, I wrote to madam herself—an appeal that would have melted a heart of stone. My cries were uttered into space. They were never allowed, in spite of all specious pretence, to penetrate the boundaries of my doom. They recoiled only upon my own fated head, precipitating its calamity, and the swifter because I was persistent in justifying my birth-name to my hateful would-be destroyer.

The little craze they called Jimmy was my sole stay and buckler. He attached himself to me vigorously, and by his quickness and waspishness more than made up for his lack of inches. I never knew who he was, or immured at whose instigation. There was warrant, anyhow, for his detention; yet not sufficient, it appeared, for his "removal." His philosophy of madness was just a counterbuff to that of the deceased Captain. If, in short, more than enough was less than nothing, then less than nothing was more than enough; wherefore Jimmy, twitted with being less than nothing, knew himself really to be greatly better than most, though he could never get over the envy of smaller souls in refusing him the credit of his stature. What is apparently little is relatively great, he often assured me, while bemoaning his inability to knock the truism into the thin asparagus heads that shot above his own sturdy one. He spent the most of his time, and I with him, in what was known as the workshop—a detached ivy-grown shed, buried amongst trees, very private, and with a deep well in it, and furnished with all sorts of dangerous tools for cranks of a mechanical turn. There he wrought incessantly, for he was a capable carpenter; and there, watching and helping him, I strove to forget something of my misery. One morning, entering this shed, we found a little group of employes gathered about the well, talking and laughing, and fishing with a long

grapnel. A partition separated us from the obscene crew, whose movements, unobserved by them, we crouched to watch.

"A thousand to one it's old Star-jelly," whispered my companion. "'Twas plain from the first the creature was booked."

They hauled it to the surface while he muttered—a sodden body caught by its waistband and doubled backwards—and slopped their hideous burden on the floor. The white sightless face settled backwards, as if with a sigh of rest, and I could hardly refrain from a scream of terror. I had known this poor thing for the few days since he had been admitted—a wreck so torn, so noisome, so straining the remnant of life through fretted lungs, it should have seemed a mockery to precipitate its end. I had known, and never, till now seeing it clothed in the white uniform of death, had recognised it. It was the mad incubus of "Rupert's Folly," caught somehow tripping at last and consigned to his doom. The red earl had succeeded by long waiting in curing himself of this itch. He was one of a deadly persistent family.

That night I could not even cry myself to sleep.

I don't know how it was that I was at last driven to visit the Suicide Tower. I had caught glimpses, remote in the grounds, of a picturesque, creeper-hung pagoda set in flowering thickets; but had always, since that first morning of deadly association with it, turned with loathing from the sight. Now, somehow, by degrees, the thing began to impress itself with a certain fascination on me. I felt drawn to it by a horrible curiosity, none the less morbidly self-indulgent because I knew that my jailer, a proselyte of the subtle Mesmer, had long been practising to master my will and get me entirely under his influence. Snuffing here, nibbling there, as it were, like a heifer approaching in pretended unconsciousness the stranger in the field, I gradually lost my power of resistance, the circumference of my

orbit slowly lessened, until, behold! one day the attraction found me helpless to oppose it, and, with a little cry to myself, I yielded and went rapidly towards the tower. As I approached the spot, I could hardly feel my limbs; my soul, penetrated with a sort of exquisite nausea, seemed already straining to leave the earth; a mist, luminous, vaguely peopled, eddied before my eyes. Perhaps a confidence derived from the possession of my duck-stone—which all this time I had been jealous to preserve, using it even occasionally, in moments of prostration, for a drug to my nerves—conduced to my undervaluing the force of temptations to which I owned such a counter-charm. In any case, I made so little resistance in the end, that the evil thing concealed amongst the thick bushes by the tower, whence and whither he had drawn me by his spells, must have chuckled to see me so easily netted.

The place was perfectly silent and beautiful. A tinkle of water, a twitter of birds reached my ears from some remote height. The tower sprang from a circular platform of stone, went up loftily, and broke at near its top into two or three little tiled flounces. Under the lowest I could see an opening pierced through a rose trellis; and right before me the unlatched door of the building was reached by a shallow flight of steps.

My heart was fluttering like a netted butterfly as I mounted them. What sinister design could possibly obtain in this still and fragrant enclosure? A flight of spiral stairs, going up the interior, was set in a very bower of plummy palms, and ferns, and clambering rich mosses, made greener by the light which entered through green *jalousies*. Here and there tiny rills of water, lowering themselves down miniature precipices, were fretted into spray that hung in the twinkling emerald atmosphere and was showered on the leaves. Caged cunningly amidst the foliage, birds of brilliant plumage chirped and flirted; or red squirrels sprang and clung, staring at me with glossy eyes; or lizards, liquid green as the sun through lime leaves, raised their

pulsing throats, and whisked and were gone. Once a snake, raising a gorgeous enamelled head, lashed its thread of tongue on the glaze of its little prison, seeming to taste my passing beauty in a wicked lust. I felt quite secure and happy. Up and up I climbed, and presently started singing softly, irresistibly, in response to the growing rapture of my flight. New beauties were revealed with every step, until in a moment, passing, at an angle, through a very thicket of blossoms into white daylight, I saw the meaning, and tottered on the brink of it all.

I had emerged upon a little ledge, a foot in width, which ringed the outside of the tower just below the first roof. I was standing there, suddenly, instantly, with not so much as an inch of parapet between my feet and the edge. Behind was the wall of the tower; below, a reeling abyss and the bare, merciless pavement. Dazzled, irresistibly drawn forward, I longed only to reach the stones and be at rest. But in that terrible moment my talisman occurred to me. Swaying, half fainting, fighting for every movement, I succeeded in drawing it from my pocket and lifting it to my nostrils—and instantly my resistance was relaxed, and I floated down on the wings of enchantment.

When I opened my eyes, drugged and smiling, it was to the vision of Dr. Peel standing before me like an awed and baffled demon. He dressed his twitching features, and came and cringed.

"Are—are you much hurt?" he stammered.

"No, sir," I murmured. "Not at all, I thank you."

"It was your skirts ballooned," he said. "I could not have thought it possible."

I sat up, reordering my hair.

"Do you now?" I said quietly. "Such an escape could hardly come within your calculations, I think."

"What do you mean?" he began loudly, and as instantly collapsed again. "You had no right to be there at all," he said.

"Nor should I," I replied, "but to show you that

virtue may have a familiar as well as vice, and one, too, capable of answering to a wicked challenge."

I got to my feet as I spoke. He stared at me utterly disconcerted, and, as I withdrew, followed me like a scourged dog.

From that time he sought rather to preserve than to destroy me, and I found myself, as one of the elect, locked into my room at night. He had realised, I suppose, that wickedness could over-reach itself in the chance entertainment of spirits potent beyond the worst it could of itself evoke; and, though he still clung to me as a sort of hostage for his own miserable salvation, made many abject efforts towards my conciliation, amongst which I had great reason to reckon a relaxation in the watchfulness which had hitherto dogged my every movement.

XIV

I AM RESCUED BY MY MONSTER

HAVE you not noticed, my little friend, how the wicked are always the superstitious? It is because life is to them full of dark corners, in which the unsuspected hides. The atheist will still be for baiting a deity whose existence he denies; he will wring a response from a vacuum, which failing, he fears to canvass emptiness for the reason.

Dr. Peel knew well the impotence of virtue to conquer. He saw it of such poor force in the world as to figure of no moment at all in a contest with vice. He did not fear God, but he feared that the devil was God, and vindictive where the harming of his protégées—of whom he had no thought but that I must be one—was concerned. He had been eye-witness of the, to him unaccountable, foiling of his project; and it struck him as if he had fallen upon an ambush in one of those dark corners. He shrunk back terrified, and thenceforth exchanged his noisome attentions to me for an attitude of propitiation which was as unwelcome, and even more stultifying, in seeming, to my hopes, inasmuch as it included an increased jealous concern for my safeguarding. But there, in the end, his service of his dark master was made to recoil upon his own head, through his very scepticism of the more divinely cunning power which works for good. He would lock me, as I said, into my room at night, thereby securing me not only from prowling evils, but an asylum in which I might ponder undisturbed what plans I could of escape. And it was that security from interruption which enabled me

presently to realise on an opportunity of which I was quite unexpectedly made the mistress.

It fell early very cold and wintry that November, but the chill in my heart was colder than any hailstones. Presently such an apathy of despair found me that I would hardly leave my room all day, but would sit in a sullen misery gazing, gazing from my unbarred open window upon the fraction of stiffening world it commanded. It was at a front angle of the house, pretty high above the ground; and under it the stony drive went round an elbow of lofty trees to the fatal unseen gates of the entrance beyond.

One morning, after breakfast, I was seated there, when a chaise rolled up to the steps of the door below, and a moment later Dr. Peel entered and was driven rapidly away, on some fresh marauding devilry, I conjectured. The vehicle, sped by a heart-whole curse from my lips, had disappeared scarce a minute, when round the bend of the shrubs it had taken came striding the oddest figure—an interloper by way of the open portals, it seemed. Such an event had never, in my knowledge, happened before. I stared, and roused myself, elate even over this momentary grotesque vision from the world beyond. It was just a stilt-walker, a monstrous pierrot, with floured absurd face and conical cap, his legs, cased in linen trousers, rising an immense height from the ground. As he came on, ridiculously gyrating, he blew a pipe, and rattled at a little tabor that hung from his neck. In the same moment he saw me where I stood, and danced up, rolling and wallowing—for he was an incomprehensibly great creature for such a trade—and broke into a mad, jerky little chaunt, half French, half English, as he approached—

“O-ha, mamselle ! Jé vous trouve, je vous salue ! A la fin çà, çà, çà !

“ ‘Be’old the mountaineer,
He sik for edelweiss,
I have found my dear
Very high and very nice —çà, çà, çà !”

He flicked off his cap—with a grin that showed, though against the flour, a set of perfect teeth—and in three strides was at the window, his eyes and huge white face above the level of the sill. Even in the instant, as if the former were a cypher momentarily isolated for my reading, I understood, and was stricken to stone.

"The graveyard!" whispered the pierrot in that instant: "be at the wall over against it at ten o'clock to-night"—and reeled away, to a pantomime of grins and pirouettes, as the lodge-keeper came raging round the corner in pursuit.

"*O que nenni dà!*" cried the intruder, twisting and turning and affecting to bend with laughter. "O, madame! O, fie! I am very honourable z'jentlemans. Wat, I say! I make you good proposals to marry. I display my parts, *v'à!*"

He contorted himself, with absurd coquetry. "Wat!" he protested, pausing; "madame declines of the ravishment? She does not move herself to fly with me? Vair well"—He pretended of a sudden to espy his pursuer, and pressing his cap to his breast, waltzed up to him.

"Hey, my little fellow," he cried (the lodge-keeper was at least as big as Daniel Lambert), "it is for you, then. You know the best wat is good. I will not abduct madame: I will not marry at all. It is vair much satisfaction. You see me dance, *hein?* Come on, jolly *garçon!*—

" 'Love miscarries—heh?
When a man marries—heh?'

When a man's single he live at his is—you spik French, but yes?"

The lodge-keeper hawked up a glair of oaths, and discharged them. He swore by all his gods that he would cut off the intruder by the legs, unless he went out, and double quick, the way he had come. Then ensued a comical scene. The pierrot, affecting to

retreat after a brief altercation, swerved suddenly and seated himself on the branch of a tree—

“O-ho!” he said, as the other came lumbering up, “it is vair well, but I make up my mind. I refuse madame, it is true. You know to marry, what it is? Listen, then—

“‘At the end of one year one baby:
That is jolly-fun!’”

The lodge-keeper, cursing, made a snatch at the man’s stilts; but, incredibly strong, he whipped them up out of reach, and held them so horizontal.

“‘At the end of two year two baby—
How it is a little serious!’”

he sang.

The lodge-keeper swore and jumped, till he was running wet for all the cold; but he was too fat a fox for these grapes.

“‘At the end of three year three baby—
But that is the very devil,’”

bawled the pierrot ferociously, and clashed the stilts like great castanets.

Then he settled himself firmly.

“‘One asks for bread,’” bellowed he; and suddenly flourishing his right stilt, caught the lodge-keeper a stinging smack across the head with it—

“‘Another for soup,’” he yelled, and gave such a counter blow with his left, that the lodge-keeper fairly reeled and went rolling over—

“‘*L’aut qui demande à têter,
Et les seins sont tarie,*’”

shouted the pierrot, and was up and out of sight in a moment, striding like Talus. The infuriate lodge-keeper rose, when he had recovered himself, to pursue; but he was too late. The pierrot had got clean away.

Not till all had been vanished many minutes did I awake from the stunned trance into which I had been

thrown by those few whispered words. Then, still by the window, I sank upon the floor, and, simultaneously, into a very reel and passion of ecstasy.

How had he traced me? Whence devised this strange method of procuring speech? Ah! as to that, there were no doubt experiences in his past life still unrelated; and, after all, did he not always in a measure—strictly in a measure—walk on stilts? This was only to extend his wooden legs indefinitely. But after what secret practices, and suspicions averted? For I held him still the creature of his despicable master. My Gogo—for it was he! My Gogo, the great resourceful, affectionate, crippled giant! It was inexpressibly touching to me to know myself, the poor persecuted, wistful dupe of Fate, still the cynosure of this burning soul—not forgotten, schemed for, held the sacred object of its desire. All the time I had thought myself abandoned, he had been weaving a ladder for my despair. Good Gogo! Dear, kind, honest Caliban! He would save me yet—he would save me; and the tears flowed from my eyes. How was he such an actor? It was true I had known hitherto only one side of him—the saturnine—the shadow of the great fallen rock. Ah, he could show a lighter for my sake—little roguish sparklets twinkling in the sun of his hot yearning. I loved him at that moment, and my tears fell for him and myself.

But, stay! What had he whispered? I must remember. At ten o'clock—the wall over against the graveyard? Why had he so chosen—so nicely specified? Did he know nothing of the patrol? Yes, likely; but it was a desperate expedient, calculated upon a possible superstition, upon a presumptive avoidance of so haunted a spot. I pressed my hands to my wet forehead and tangled hair. He had dared and done all he could: the rest was for me, whom he knew and could trust. I would not be unworthy. I would answer to him wit for wit.

Half an hour later, serene and wicked as he could have wished, I took my way, singing, into the grounds,

and, unaccosted, sought that remote quarter where the graveyard was situated. Still softly singing, I pushed between the trees, and came out into the waste interval against the boundary wall which was devoted to the watch. Stooping here to pick some chance berries, I had not to wait a minute before the local sentinel, as I had calculated, was upon me. I dropped my spray, with an aspect of alarm that struggled into piteousness.

"O, I am so sorry!" I said.

The man—he was personable enough to make my task the less nauseous—eyed me, insolent and masterful.

"All right," he said. "Blow me if you ain't done it now. Why, don't you know as this here's Prisoner's Base, and you're out of bounds?"

I went up to him fearlessly, and taking his hands, muffled in great hairy gloves, looked up into his face. I saw a spot of deeper colour come into his cheeks, and he breathed fast.

"Shall I confess," I said, low and urgent, and glancing quickly about me, "that I wanted to be caught?"

"Ah!" he said, and showed his teeth in a twitching grin.

"Hush!" I whispered. "I am in great despair. You know perfectly well I am sane; I shall die if I am detained here longer."

"O! will you?" he responded.

"Listen," I said, flushing and hanging my head. "I offer you no money, which I have not got. But there are things—other things—sold here, which"—

I tore my hands away, and, putting them to my face, fell back from him.

"Hey!" he said, in a thick whisper, and pursued me. "Why do you pick *me* out for your favours, you little beauty?"

I did not answer.

"Why?" he insisted.

"If it has to be," I muttered from my refuge, "you—O, don't ask me!"

"Why?" he said.

"Well, of twenty evils, choose the best-looking."

He gave a low chuckle.

"Come along, where we can be private," said he, and put a hand on me; but I started back, affecting an agony of shame.

"O! what have I said—what promised? Let me go. Don't think any more of it."

"Won't I?" he said; and added threateningly: "You've given your promise, remember."

I looked about me, and again upon my twined fingers.

"To-night, then, at—at ten o'clock."

"Where?"

"In the workshop."

"You can get out?"

"Yes; I have a way."

"That you have," he said, coveting me with his eyes; "and a pretty one, my darling."

I entreated him once more, in a passion of emotion—

"If—if I consent, you'll hold to your part of the bargain?"

"Eh?" he questioned.

"Help me to escape?"

"No fear o' my forgetting," he answered. "You may lay to that."

I knew he meant to betray me in the double sense, and would have given more than I feigned to barter at that moment for the leave to beguile him to me, and slip a knife into his lying throat. But I tasted part of my revenge in the thought of his freezing alone there by and by, in the rendezvous to which my wits had decoyed him, while I went to my other undisturbed.

He was jealous of me, and suspicious still of so light a surrender. But the prize was worth the risking; and in the end he let me go, gloating over my stealthy retreat, as a cruel schoolmaster might watch the slinking

away of a delinquent whom he had ordered up for punishment later.

That night fell a harder frost, with glittering stars but no moon. Early secured in my sanctum, I awaited the great moment in such an indescribable agony of mind as I have never felt before or since. Every step near my door was a tread upon a nerve. The stable clock, when it rang out, clear and sonorous, the last quarter after nine, seemed to brain me with its every stroke. I stole to the open window, took intent stock of the quiet, seated myself, poised to spring, on the sill, and passed my duck-stone at a little distance under my nostrils. The next instant I had alighted safely on my feet, and reeling against the wall beneath, stood a minute to recover. The next, I was round the angle of the house, and sped into the dark shrubberies, where were safety and concealment.

Going very softly in my stockinged feet, and careful of my knowledge not to penetrate the thicket until close upon the appointed place, I reached my goal upon the stroke of the hour.

"Well!" whispered a voice from the starlight. "I could trust you."

He had been stretched recumbent on the wall top, and now rose cautiously to my view, no longer the whitened fool, but the true Gogo of my affections. I looked up at him as from a well; and he swung his long stilts over, as he sat, so that they rested on the ground beneath.

"Quick!" he muttered; "without a moment lost—swarm! I can't bend."

Heaven knows how I did it—with no better show of grace than Lady Sophia, I fear. But somehow I scrambled up, until he could reach my hands, and haul me with a mighty power beside him. Then, once more, swing went his legs, and there was the ladder for my descent on the other side.

I clung to him convulsively; I kissed his hands; I could not refrain from sobbing.

"O, Gogo!" I said; "what you have saved me from—O, Gogo, what!"

His breath caught like a wounded lion's.

"Not yet," he whispered. "There is far to go first!"

"Put me down, then," I answered, alert in the stress of things.

"No," he said. "On my back—quick!"

"You are going to carry me?"

"There are bloodhounds," he replied. "There must be no tracks but the stilts'—no scent for them to follow."

Then I understood the fulness of his plan; but still I lingered, amazed.

"I am not a child. What strength, though yours, could bear me so?"

He showed me a long staff that leaned to him against the outer wall.

"There is my third prop," he said. "When I am driven, I can still seat you upon a branch, and save the scent. The ground is iron, and"—he struck his chest—"these ribs. Come, and let me wear my heart upon my sleeve."

The next moment we were off. The great creature swayed beneath me like a tree; but he never staggered or faltered, save periodically to rest himself and me. The sweet night wind blew upon my face, cold and colder. I snuggled from it into the vast nape of his neck, which was like a mat for warmth. I had no idea or care whither he was taking me, and the knowledge only that it was by roads deserted at this silent hour. Still he held on, and, when frost and weariness threatened to numb my brain, could spare a strong hand to imprison both mine lest I fell. And still the flight endured, and I asked, could ask, no question, not even when I grew penetrated by a dull consciousness of ascent—of my comrade straining and toiling beneath me like a stricken Sisyphus—of the groaning of the giant spirit in him who would not be subdued. Then,

at last, came a pause, and darkness and release; and I felt myself swung gently down to rest upon a mat of scented leaves, whose warmth and fragrance wooed me to such a sleep as I had never known before.

XV

I BECOME AN INMATE OF "RUPERT'S FOLLY"

I AWOKE, flushed and happy as a dormouse from its winter bed of leaves. The world was good again, with all its potentialities of love and freedom; the sun was somewhere seeking me; there was no ache, but the sweet ache of memory, in my whole heart and body. Locality, I have said before, has never influenced my temper. I make the only reservation now of liberty to change it at my will.

I remained some time, with my hands beneath my head, taking stock motionlessly of my new surroundings. They were odd enough. I lay near the wall, it seemed, of a sort of circular ground chamber or cellar, roofed in at an inexplicable height above me. Twice, at intervals between, projecting corbels appeared to show the one-time existence of upper floors, which, having either rotted away or been removed, had left the chamber of a height quite disproportionate with its ground dimensions. In lieu of stairs, a make-shift ladder went up into the roof at a crazy angle, and disappeared through a trap; but it started from the ground so close to a rude fireplace in the wall, that its butt was scorched, and more than one of the lower rungs snapped in its socket.

Over the floor itself were scattered tokens of some late or present occupation—a common table, a rush chair or two, battered saucepans, a greasy gridiron, and, hanging on the walls, a frowzy account of clothes. A line, stretched across a segment of the room, had

once held suspended a litter of foul-washed clouts ; but the string had broken, and its filthy load been kicked aside or trodden into the floor, half brick half muck, which paved the apartment.

There were no windows, but, at irregular intervals, narrow loops such as one sees in old castles ; and the single ground opening was a doorway, which let in just such a smear of daylight as served to emphasise the uncleanness.

Recognising in all this the reverse of familiar, I let my wondering eyes travel round to the parts more contiguous to my bed, and so gave a little pleased start and smile. There, like guardian posts to my slumber, were the long stilts leaned against the wall, their straps hanging loose ; and pendent from a nail close by was the very clown's dress of my memory. I could have drawn it to me and kissed it ; but, contenting myself with conceding to it a sigh of affection, I sank back and closed my eyes. Lying thus deliciously, half-submerged in a very nest of dry fern, and with a heavy cloak for blanket over me, I would delay luxuriously the moment of revelation ; but it was very evident, I thought, that Gogo had brought me to some wrecked and deserted mill.

Suddenly, unable to rest longer, I peeped. He was going softly about the hearth, preparing something at a little fire, whose every thicker waft of smoke he would jealously dissipate with his hands. He still feared observation, then ! Watching him silently, my heart welled up with a gush of love for the dear, patient, faithful monster. "Gogo !" I said softly.

He started, looked across, and came to me at once, stumping over the floor in a rapture of response. He took a stool, and, sitting on it by me, gazed eagerly into my face, his own—animal, sinful, and divine—looking from a very burning bush of stubble.

Smiling, in a drowsy warmth, I put out a hand, and let him imprison it in his own. Ah, foolish little bird, so to commit thyself to the snare of the fowler ! I

thought he would have killed it, and tore it back fluttering and wounded.

"O, how could you?" I cried. "I was so happy; and you have hurt me!"

He leaned in a hoarse agony to me; his breath groaned in his chest.

"O, come to me!" he implored, "while I make one mouthful of you!"

Then, all in an instant, he was sobbing, and tearing at his short hair, and crying incoherently—

"What have I done?—to wound my dear! Ride me, flog me, use me, but trust me no more. Bitter, bitter are the gods, who make a man stiff-kneed for their sport! Not love or penance for me, never, never. Never to kneel—to lie prone only for a show! O, child! it seems a little thing not to kneel, but—ah, to see others pray and love, yourself forbidden—what pity, what pity! I am the Olympian fool; I am the ass and clown. Behold my livery!"

He pointed to the dress on the wall, and hung his head and arms in a very grief of despondency. But by now my hurt and little fright were gone, and my heart to be hed again to softness.

"Gogo," I said, "give it me down, please." And he looked up wondering, and stirred and obeyed.

"This, and this, and this," I said, "in pledge of our one-day contract before Jove, or Jehovah, when the maimed shall be made whole."

My tears dropped on it, as I kissed it three times and gave it back to him. He received it wonderingly first, then sadly, and held it drooping over his knees.

"Whole!" he muttered. "Ay, I don't question I shall find my legs in Avalon; but can even Jove restore the rifled flower its honey?"

Suddenly he cast himself down beside me, groaning like a bull.

"O, little maid, little maid! I am a beggar, I am a beggar; but I want no reversion of a used estate. Though my own goes lame, I am proud. Give me new-

minted money, that no man has worn in his pocket, or none at all."

For a moment the great human urgency of the creature made me falter. I owed him so much! could the devotion of my life more than repay him? But, alas! it needed but a little reflection to see the fond ridiculous picture the caricature it was. Had I the right even to risk a new generation of Gogos? I saw myself in imagination walking abroad, the proud convoy of an uncountable number of little shock-headed Dutch tumblers. Perhaps if our Sovereign King had received that Carpenters' Petition, and brought wooden legs into fashion, I might have been tempted; but it was still the vogue to walk on one's own feet.

I sat up, my lips twitching perilously near laughter.

"Dear Gogo," I said, "I am so thankful to you, and so sorry; and I would not have said or done what I did, if I had known it would disturb you so. Won't you let me get up?"

He scrambled to his feet—ah, fie upon the unmeant cruelty of the word!—and stood knotting his great hands, while his breast heaved stormily.

"Well, I think I was mad," he roared suddenly. "Strike me! Stamp on me! Bind me to a pillar, and let the eternal remorse batten on my vitals! Whatever the spark at my tail, it started me up like a rocket: and behold me at the end, a blackened and empty case!"

He entreated me with his hands—

"Ah, the pagan sight of you! Ah, your wild hair, growing from the fern or melting into it! Ah, your face, the very flowering of a hamadryad! It wrought a frenzy in my brain. Forgive me, forgive me! And I will serve you seven times seven years, for the promise only to be godfather to your last—your Benjamin!"

He sank down on the stool, and, burying his face in his hands, was silent.

I thought a practical rescue of the situation best, and rising from my bed, went to bestir myself over the fire, which was burning redly. Moreover, a delectable

odour had already reached my nostrils from the little caldron he had hung there, and whose contents were beginning to inspire me with a very lively curiosity.

I turned to the poor sufferer.

"Gogo, please, it is very sad; but if I am to go on being a hamadryad I must be fed. Gogo, what is in the pot?"

He lifted his head, with a sigh.

"Snipe," he said, most tragically.

"Ah! What else?"

"A hare, a partridge, teal."

"O!"

"Onions, potatoes, carrots."

"O—o!"

"Larks, chestnuts"—

"Be quiet, lest I cry. You are the best of creatures, and I am the hungriest."

"Eat what you will. It is my *pot au feu*—nothing finished before the next is added."

"I can wait no longer. You are the hermit of hermits. Who is your commissariat-general?"

"Who but the child your little friend."

"My"—

"Miss Grant."

"Patty!"

He had arisen, and come across to me.

"She lays it in a hollow tree, twice a week, and twice a week I go down by night and fetch it."

I stood gaping, staring at him.

"Gogo! Where are we?"

"In 'Rupert's Folly.'"

"In—!"

I gave a little cry. He seized me by the wrist, and dragged me towards the opened door.

"O, Gogo!" I choked, struggling and resisting, "we shall be seen."

"What does it matter if we are," he said fiercely, "since you loathe me?"

I wept and fondled him, in an agony of fear.

"I don't loathe you. You are my one stay and comfort. Gogo! Will you give me back to that terror?"

He fell squatting at my feet—it was his substitute for kneeling—and clasped his arms about my skirt.

"Beast!" he groaned; "I neither meant nor could help it. To play upon your fears!—To taste love by deputy!—O, forgive me, forgive me!"

"Yes," I said quietly, "for the second time and always, because of what you have done. But I fear for myself now, and shall go on fearing. Let me go—O, Gogo, let me escape into the woods, and break my heart on frost and hunger rather than wrong."

Still clutching at me, with a look of horror, as if he felt the shadow of his last hope eluding him, he scrambled erect again.

"Hunger!" he said. "Think of the snipe and teal! Listen to me, Diana. Before God, I will not offend again. Base, black coward that I am! Before God, Diana!"

I gazed at him intently.

"Why have you brought me here, Gogo?"

"Because," he answered, "there was no nearer and surer refuge."

"I don't understand."

"Ah, child! But you have not heard the story."

"Well," I murmured, reassured, though still shy of him, "if you will keep your promise and be good, you shall tell it me by and by."

He gave a great sigh, and, gently disengaging myself, I stole to the door, while he followed me with his agitated eyes, and peered out. It was Shole, indeed, and the familiar village green that I saw beneath me, looking down the long wintry slope. Quiet and deserted in the chill mists of dawn, no view apparently less tragic, less harmful, could have greeted me. I returned to my companion, who received me with a pathetic relief. He was quite pale and trembling.

"If my arms had the reach of my heart!" he said. "Well, you have come back; and so—for breakfast."

"Patty's pot," said I merrily. "The dear shall put new heart into me, as her wont was."

He had bread, and some bottles of wine, a little of which I drank mixed with water. It was the loveliest, most intoxicating meal; and, when it was over, full of a new grace I bid Gogo to my side.

"Now," said I, "tell me your story."

"Well, first," he said with a grunt, "for your safety here. It was the astrologer's, and now is ours. He was carried away in a thunderstorm, on a red cloud."

"What do you mean, Gogo, please?"

"I repeat the common superstition. Anyhow, he is gone, and the place is haunted and avoided since. Not a clown but myself will come within a mile of it; and as for me, I have lived here for a month undisturbed already."

"You? But I know where the poor wretch was taken, and where he died."

"In the asylum, eh? It is what I supposed; and the red earl comes to his own. Tell me about it."

"By and by. I want to know first what brought you here."

"The wish to lose myself and be lost, where I could devise a plan for your rescue."

"You knew where I had been taken, then?"

"No perspicacity of mine. It was the common report. You had lost your head over love unrequited, and it had become necessary to confine you for a while."

"O, indeed! Go on."

"I hear your little white teeth clicking. Rest content. You are avenged: he has married her."

I jumped to my feet.

"He! de Crespigny?"

"Yes."

I burst into a shriek of laughter.

"They were reconciled, then? O, the dear particular lady! Does he wipe his boots on her? Did he take his love-potion very strong on the wedding night?"

"Very strong, no doubt," said Gogo. And then suddenly he clasped my skirt, and buried his face in it.

"He would ; it was his way," he muttered. "O, girl, spare me and my unhappiness—my broken dreams! Did you not know? I had always a struggle to keep him from it. And now he will go down, down."

"Yes," I said, "while she clings to his legs, as fools drown together."

"Would you not have had her try to save him?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Ah! You are vindictive."

"Don't you hear me laughing?"

"Yes ; like the devil."

"Is it? I should be mad indeed if I could applaud her. Do you bear in mind what she has done to me? She is of the sort who make cruelty their pander—a frowsy, garterless Jezebel. O, how I hate prudery! For five years I longed to open the windows on it, and let the air in, and whatever wholesome little devils beside. I declare I loathe myself to be of her sex. Touch me, Gogo. Am I the same, or different? O, to be sure! I wish her joy of her bargain—and him."

"She will pay. But for Noel, weak child of genius—leave me the sorrow of my broken hopes, Diana."

"And nothing else? Why did he not meet me?"

"He had not the courage at the last moment."

"And so, having cut the ground from under me, he stepped back, and instigated madam to her little *coup de théâtre*, I suppose, and helped her to push me over the precipice. And you—you sympathised with and abetted him?"

"Ay," he said sorrowfully: "witness my long exile here, gnawing my fingers in the hungry moonlight."

I sank upon the ground in a passion of tears, and he mingled his grief with mine.

"Child, I had loved him; and I had but to learn how he had abandoned you, to leave him. I cursed him—cursed de Crespigny. Will Jove forgive me? What matter, if I have saved you?"

I lifted my drowned eyes and agonised arms.

"Take me to Patty," I cried, "and let me weep my soul out on her kind little heart."

He shook his head.

"What!" I said; "you will not?"

"She must not even know," he said. "I could not trust her anxious love. She must rest as she is, aware of my endless scheming, but not of its fruits. Some day, perhaps. And in the meanwhile my lady is gone honeymooning; there is no hope of appeal to her. A breath would redeliver you to your fate, and perhaps a worse. Come, and tell me all you have suffered, poor mistress."

I crept to his feet, and in broken tones gave him the history of my misery, to the day, to the hour when he had appeared before me.

"And you have not told me," I said, "how that was."

"Once," he answered, "after I had hidden and settled here, I was spying through the telescope above—(Ay," he interrupted himself, to my exclamation, "they could be bold to capture the dying sorcerer, but to meddle with his tools was beyond their courage)—when I was witness of a characteristic little *affaire* on the green below. There were a stilt-walker and his wench—a couple of the wandering tribe—a long-legged bird of passage and his little *cocotte* of bright plumage. I could see her glitter where I stood—could see her spangles, and the ribbons float from her tambour as she danced. And then suddenly my lord viscount was on the scene. He had been sporting, and carried his gun. He had keepers with him (they were his own; not, as might have seemed apter to his wits, Dr. Peel's); and his dogs 'pointed' at the gipsy, I suppose. Anyhow, there was an altercation; and the next I saw was the clown tipped up by his wooden heels, and lying prone. They carried off the girl—willing or unwilling, it would have needed a stronger telescope than the astrologer's to discern—and presently the poor stunned fool came to his senses and sat up. I could see him try to gather his wits with his hand, plucking at his brow. He was

alone, who had been in company. Where were the rest—his ravished mate, and the mob for whom she had tripped and sung? By and by I saw him, with many starts and delays, unbuckle his stilts, and, having shouldered them, hobble with slow, painful steps towards the village. He disappeared, and till night I sat thinking of him, and of the 'Contrat Social,' which M. Rousseau wrote for the angels, and which, therefore, you would not understand, Diana, though, for all my better sense, I adore you. About dark I descended into the woods at the back yonder; and there I came upon my stilt-walker seated dying against a tree. Yes, he was dying. His fall had shattered some ribs, and driven one into his lung, and death was already thawing the white snow on his face into patches of blue. I carried him up to the tower, and eased what I could of his agony, and received his last message to the world. It is a callous world, this world of '87; a world of serf and Satan and Christianity crushed between. But I tell you I would rather give that message than receive it: would rather be Gogo, the clown and pariah, than the Viscount Salted with all his prospective acres. Well, he died, and I took a spade, and buried him at the foot of the tree where he had rested. Pray God it bears wholesome acorns, for why should he wish to poison the swine his brothers? Then I inherited his property; and a thought, an inspiration, occurred to me how I might use it. Was I not wont to stump the country, like a halting orator? I could stump it to higher purpose now—the purpose of your redemption. Sure the spirit of the dead clown would uphold me, for was it not privilege I fought? So, with no great practice necessary, I became a stilt-walker; and presently ventured afield, starting by night, reaping my little harvest of pence in the far villages by day, and under cover of dark returning. Gradually I contracted my circuit, hovering about your prison; and so, once upon a time, peering over the wall in a wintry evening, spied your figure come

and go in the light of a high room. It might be yours! I must dare all, and cast the die. Well, Fortune favours—the fortunate."

He ended, to a little silence.

"Poor Gogo," I said softly. "It is true, I do believe, that I am her spoilt doll."

"And I," he said, "her Dutch tumbler."

XVI

I PUT AN END TO ONE FOLLY

HANGING and wiving go by Destiny, which must be my excuse for accepting the silken cord which was weaving for my neck all this time. I knew no more than patient Griselda about my impending fate; yet Destiny was not to be gainsaid because I seemed content to resolve upon Gogo for my present welfare and protection.

He, good monster, never alluded again, during all the days I was with him, to his unhappy passion. He was slavish in his loyalty to his word, and in his attentions to the poor creature so utterly in his power. And if I could not but understand the significance of his sighs and oglings and contortions, my feigned ignorance of those hieroglyphics was undoubtedly the most merciful of all the tortures I might have inflicted on him. Thinking of this, I find salve for certain bruises on my conscience, which, nevertheless, were, I am sure, quite unnecessarily self-inflicted. I acted for the best, and with great pain to myself. He has admitted this since, though confessing he was long in forgiving me.

I was in the tower, in all, but four days, which, nevertheless, might have been as many weeks for their tediousness. Gogo was an incomparable slave and henchman, only his devotion necessarily lacked the relish of publicity. If I could have had but one other to whom to boast it, I could have endured it longer. But to be Single-heart's exclusive fetish, immured in his wigwam and appropriated to his sole

company, was what never appealed to me. Nor do I believe that it does truthfully to any other. We are omnivorous; we can't live on spoon-meat alone; and there is an end of it.

"Gogo," I said once, "why are you so attached to me?"

"Why?" said he, throwing up his hands, after his fashion, with a sort of protesting groan to the powers that be. "Because I am a creature of surfaces and impressions; because, drawing my life from the great external of all, it is my doom to worship externals. We talk of our inheriting the world. Pooh! we are just an itch on the skin of this monster, whose dark internals are as remote from us as our own hated organs. Have we ever a thought of possessing our kingdom? Think with what terror we contemplate a living burial. We are the dust of contact between earth and sky; are bandied between space and matter, the dross of one or the scum of the other. Love itself is but the measure of our penetration. It is the propagation of superficies: it probes no farther: and all the time is breathing in the air like a swimmer. Are my eyes in my feet? Ask me why I hate the dark, and am attached to the light—to the brightest gnat of an hour flying within it."

"Thank you, sir," said I. "And that is me, I suppose?"

"That is you," he said—"dancing on a window-pane, and wondering what fate keeps you from the garden beyond."

"And you," I said, "are the spider lurking in the window-corner, *n'est ce pas*, and wondering what fate keeps you from devouring me. Well, you are very complimentary; but, for my part, I would rather have an hour's dancing on the surface than possess all the world that's under."

"Ay," he answered, "and that's why I covet you."

Now, was he not an inexplicable creature, and, it must be said, a depressing? Moreover, for all his

advocacy of my cause, I could never quite reconcile him to my view of madam.

"Remember the day of the picture," he would say; "and how she rebuked us all by her attitude. If I testify to your martyrdom, Diana, I must testify to hers that preceded it."

"She is welcome to the palm," I cried. "And may she live long to flaunt her conquest."

He did not answer; and so letting his dissent pass by default, put a bar between us that was never quite surmounted.

In the meanwhile, day followed day, and the frost held, and I was cold and *ennuyée*; and still he delayed our flight on the score of peril. I had come but poorly clad for the test, and I cried and shivered much in our dismal refuge, where what fire we could afford must be kept low from dread of the smoke betraying us. Present food we had, and some wine that helped a little to comfort our dejection; and on the Friday he was due, tramping fourteen miles thither and back over the hills, to claim his fresh dole of the tree above Wellcot, where faithful Patty—who was in his confidence as to his retreat, and the means towards my salvation he hoped to make of it—was wont to conceal it. Dear darling! How I longed to convey her a message; but he would not hear of it.

"Of all ephemera," he said, "she is the very transparent-bodied fly, the secrets of whose own heart she cannot help but reveal."

So I had to submit, and hold her sweet image in my arms o' nights, when the wind came in at the door and the stars crackled with cold. But Gogo was right, I had to confess, when once from the deep woods beyond Shole we heard the clanging of bloodhounds, and knew that my enemies were vainly seeking the trail which had no existence. Then I cowered low, and felt a new gush of affection for the resourceful giant who was so wise in the singleness of his passion.

Often by day I would climb up the ladder to the

loft where the astrologer's telescope yet remained, commanding, like a disused cannon, the house and village he had fancied under its dominion, and there spend hours spying hungrily for what tokens of life the bitter season afforded. They were not many or inspiriting; but they served at least to keep me in touch with that world of my fellows that seemed eternally lost to me.

On the Friday I fell at Gogo's feet.

"Safe or unsafe," I cried, "take me away! I can stand this loneliness no longer."

His face was full of a sorrowful ecstasy.

"And it was a garden to me," he murmured; "blind that I am!"

"I shall die," I cried terribly, "and you will lay me with the dead clown under the tree."

"So would you be for ever mine," he continued, in a sort of dream.

I shrunk from him, and seeing my look, he cast himself down on his face before me.

"Command me as you will," he cried; "only never, never bid me from serving you."

"You will go?" I sat back, eagerly canvassing him. "Why should I dream of parting with you? Are not our fortunes pledged together, even if I did not owe you the best of all gratitude? You are so wise and brave; you will find a plan and a direction. Only I can stop here no longer.—O, I can't!—Gogo, take me away—to London—anywhere."

He raised himself.

"Spare me this evening to forage," he said, "so that to-morrow we can at least start provided."

In deep night he left me, to go to the tree. It was the first time I had been abandoned to my sole self. So long as I could discern his figure, striding over the fields, like some unearthly goblin, on its high stilts, I stood by the door gazing into the starlight. Then, when I could see him no more, I sat down just within, my back to the vast emptiness,

and hugged and cried to myself against the long panic of waiting.

Not many minutes had I sat thus, when something—a footstep, a shadow—seemed to fall upon my heart with a shock that stopped its beating. Too terrified for look or utterance, I crouched low, hoping the thing would pass, and leave me unobserved.

“I have come, madam, to invite you to a safer asylum,” said a low and musical voice.

I gave an irresistible cry, suppressing it instinctively, even in its emission, lest it should call back my faithful squire, from his long toil across the fields, to a need which these gentle tones were far from justifying. I struggled to my feet, and made myself as small as possible against the wall.

“Who are you?” I whispered.

“An outcast like yourself,” answered the shadow; “a fellow-sufferer at the hands of the very family to which you owe your misfortunes.”

“Who are you?” I could only whisper again.

“I am George Rowe,” it said. “Do you remember me? We have met once—an ineffaceable impression to me. I have followed your career since; unknown to you, have traced you by the flowers in your footsteps—yes, even to that wicked place, and your flight from it. I have watched you since from the woods below; have stood at this door at night and listened to your breathing till I maddened; have sorely bided my time, seeking to speak to you. I have tracked the honest tracker, your good servant and saviour; and, while I applaud his devotion, must warn you against the equivocal position in which your further acceptance of that devotion may place you.”

I could not see his face, but only the dusk of a comely form, as it stood now before me. Well could I recall, indeed, “the good-humoured gentleman in the grey coat,” who had once so espoused my childish cause, and earned thereby the hatred of his kins-

men. My confidence was returning to me with my wits.

"You are very considerate for us," I said deridingly. "Do you come as madam your sister's emissary, since you are so particular for my character?"

"Alas!" he said, "you do well to doubt me, being so related. But I am an outlaw from all that house's influence and consideration."

"An outlaw—you!" I murmured.

"Ay," he answered; "ruined, menaced, and driven forth to nurse my wrongs in hiding."

"Why, where?" I asked.

"To the woods," he answered, "like Robin Hood."

"O, an attractive asylum, sir, for distressed ladies," I said.

He replied, "Maid Marian thought so."

"Perhaps she had an attachment there," said I. "I miss the application to myself."

He laughed softly.

"Whether we fly from fear, or fly to love, we fly," he said. "You may hold your enemies too cheap, not knowing that my lord makes interest with his sister, and for his own purposes, to subsidise your Dr. Peel. For the sake of the secrets of the prison-house, he will not leave her solus to the hue and cry. You have planted two dragon-heads in place of the one you severed."

I shrunk before him.

"What do you mean? How do you know?"

"By the token," he said, "that he destined me to your fate, and I answered with the better part of valour, which you will be wise to imitate."

"To-morrow," I muttered; "we had already decided."

"That is not all, nor enough," he urged. "You may be Una, *with* a rhinoceros, and that is not enough. My lord rides a thunder-bolt. It is not enough to flee him; you must vanish—be no more."

Now all of a sudden—I know not how—his words seemed to wake me to the fond illusion of my state.

How, indeed, was I situated, with a legless Caliban to show me how to run? I had been blinded, by Gogo's devotion, to the real nature of the presumption it had thought to justify. What honest right had he to have undertaken so responsible a deed, save he had provided for it to the last details? I felt suddenly very naked and forlorn—shiftless and crying, like some poor exposed child in the night. I clasped my fingers to the shadow, entreating it in a broken voice—

“What am I to do? Advise me, help me!”

It moved upon me, soft, and swift, and irresistible. I felt my hands imprisoned—seized as out of the grave into an assurance of human warmth and sympathy.

“For what else am I here?” demanded the fervent voice. “Have I not the prior claim? Have you never thought of me in all these years—of what you might be now, save for my interference?”

“Yes,” I whispered. “Indeed, indeed I am not one to forget.”

“Well,” he said, “I am just a vagabond at last, and desperate in romance; and you—your reason is forfeit, if not your life. Be under no delusion about it; nor about the real impotence of this good fellow to save you. Come with me, then, while there is time, and be my little sister. I am lonely in the deep woods.”

I did not move or speak, but I gazed up intently into the white bloom of his face. The strangest thought was struggling for expression in me—of some conscious gravitation, through all these years, towards an affinity which had been shadowed out to me at that first and only meeting. I felt no shyness, but only a restful confidence in his company. Was not that strange? To be brother and sister, one and indivisible in the candid sympathies of Nature. I recognised in a moment that it was that ideal relationship which had always appealed to me for the best and purest—that I could never be happy again divorced from it.

Suddenly the tears were in my eyes.

"If I could truly be your little sister," I said, "and keep house for you, as Gretel did for the gentle shepherd who had plucked her when a flower."

He heaved a long sigh, full of rapture.

"Quick, then! let me pluck my flower," says he, "and run."

But now, at that, for some reason, a revulsion of feeling took me. I sank down upon the ground away from him, and hid my face in my hands.

"No, no," I cried—"not yet, not now. O, leave me, *please!*"

Perhaps he was wise to understand and temporise. Anyhow, he went, though no farther than the door.

For a moment I hated myself; for a moment I felt the basest thing on earth. What use to reflect that reason and kindness were on my side: that, since I could not cure a poor fond fool, it were no mercy, but the contrary, to submit him to the continued infection of my presence? I said so to myself, and saying it, saw his face returning—full of light and eagerness—to learn the damning truth! To be held accursed in that great heart! I could not, I could not! Poor Gogo! Had he not given up everything for me? I would not desert him. Why should he not come too? But no: I saw in the same instant that that was impossible, since he himself had no thought, no wish, to be my brother. And perhaps, if I went, I should never see him again. Well, would not that be the best for him? Let me nurse my grief eternal, so long as he found *his* cure in separation. It were better I should go. Freed of this incubus, he would have no longer need to crouch and starve. The world had no reason, so far as I knew, to identify him with my flight. And now every hour he remained with me was an added peril to his safety, his very existence!

Quite wild, I rose to my feet and went panting to the shadow.

“Take me away,” I said, “before he breaks my heart, returning.”

He took my hand tight in his, drew me under the starlight, and together we fled down the hill and into the woods.

XVII

I AM CONSIGNED TO A GREEN GRAVE

TO you, my dear Alcide, conscience is, I know, a disease, and virtue its relapse. I do not, then, ask your sympathy, but only your commiseration in that long struggle with my better self in which I was now to engage—a struggle which found me child, and left me woman—a struggle through whose intermittent deliriums moved ever the sorrowful figure of my poor lost Gogo.

Yet I must own that the oasis in which this destiny was to be fulfilled figured for a period the greenest in all my desert career. It was a dear time, in truth; a dear, abandoned, wonderful time, until the inevitable disenchantment came. Alas! to take profit of ~~your~~ own unselfishnesses is, with a stern Providence, to convert them into the plainest of worldly transactions!

No word passed between me and my companion as we hurried, deeper and deeper, into the fathomless woods. Sure of foot and, it seemed, of destination, he drew me unresisting by cloudy deeps of foliage, by starlit alleys, by ways so thronged and massed with trunks as to seem impenetrable. Often I shrunk before some imaginary charge of shadows; often cried out in the silent rush of woodland things across our path. There was no wind that could reach and buffet those packed desolations; no frost, save where in the clearings it could find space to bloom. And these, for precaution's sake, we avoided, lest our footsteps should betray us. On and on we sped, till my heart was sick in my breast, and I cried out to rest and die. But he would not let me stop.

"Courage, little sister!" he cried; "we are within a cast of home."

We mounted, after that, a long and gentle hill, from whose sides the trees fell away, till, on the summit, there was none. But here, sunk deep in the crest, was, as I could discern, an ancient gravel pit, whose slopes were rough with brake and brush to a giddy distance down.

"Come," he whispered, and clasped my hand secure.

We descended by a path, that was no path to me, and, at the bottom, stooped under a very thicket of bush, and gained once more a sense of space and movement, but so deadly close-shut that for a little I dared not stir.

"Come," whispered my companion again. "It is nothing but a cleft in the hill, but so overgrown above that no mortal would guess it there."

Still I dared not move. When suddenly I felt his arm about me, and his lips on mine. Then I started to myself with a shock of anger.

"Is this to be a brother?" I cried.

"What else," he murmured, "to give his little sister confidence."

The low laugh with which he said it made my blood fire. I could have struck him in my fury.

"Go on!" I said, in a repressed voice. "I have come so far; I must follow, I suppose."

"Will you not let me lead you?"

"No."

"You may stumble in the dark."

"Not to the fall you think."

"I am sorry."

"Very well. Go on."

He went before, submissively. The gully cut straight, like a giant furrow, through the hill. It was narrow and pitch-dark, sodden here and there with dripping water, and always smelling like a vault. Not once in its entire length, so far as I could see, did the dense

mat of overgrowth thin to that texture that a star of all the hosts above was visible.

At last he stopped so suddenly that I near fell against him.

"Hush!" he whispered, "we are at the end. Can you see enough to follow me?"

"Yes," I said; "my eyes are opened now."

He had hard work, I knew, to suppress a chuckle over my tragic tone.

"Well, keep them so," said he; and, elbowing up a great pad of foliage, beckoned to me to pass. I obeyed, holding my skirts from him, and in a moment discovered myself in the open once more.

We had emerged, it seemed, high on the near perpendicular side of another pit, or cutting. Right beneath us, shouldering the very steep on which we were perched, was the thatched roof of a cottage, an open skylight in the midst gaping at us scarce ten feet below. So close did it invite us, in the bewildering starlight, that I was near springing, on the thought, to gain its shelter. But my companion restrained me.

"Wait," he whispered drily. "A little of your discretion, please."

Doubtful of me, he let go his hold reluctantly, and stooping once more under the curtain of foliage, dragged out a ladder, which was concealed behind, and which he now, with infinite precaution, lowered through the skylight till it rested.

"Now," he said, "climb down, while I hold it firm."

It was the rudest thing; just slats nailed across a pole—a ladder for bears, not men. But I was young and lithe, and quickly was down and through, and standing, trembling over this finish to my adventure, on the floor of a little dark, invisible room. And so, before I had time to collect myself, the other was descended in my footsteps, and the ladder hauled in and laid along the wall, and a little silence ensued.

"Well," said his voice at length, "you are safe at last, little sister."

Then, I don't know how it was, the tears would come.

"Why, don't you believe it?" he whispered, groping a step nearer.

"Have you 'given me reason to?" I answered, shrinking from his touch, and gulping down my sobs.

He drew away at once.

"The best reason in the world," he said coldly, "since I have placed my life in your hands—since I leave you here the means to escape, if you will, and curry favour by betraying me."

I could have cried out on his cruelty, but dared not.

"Understand, this is your sanctuary," he went on, "prepared against your coming, and which none, in their turn, will betray. The path to it is sacred to me. No one will disturb you; you are secure as a bird in its nest. There is a bed in a corner; rushlight and holder and tinder-box on a table by. Light, and take possession. I must go and reassure Portlock."

I heard him move softly over the floor; a trap opened somewhere, letting in a momentary weak film of light, and he was gone.

For a time I stood motionless, hearing the murmur of voices somewhere below; then, suddenly panicstruck, groped for the table and tinder, and shakily struck fire. The wick caught, flamed up and settled, and I saw my possession.

It was the tiniest, kindest little room, under a sloping roof, clean and friendly, with a white bed. I was dazed and weary beyond speculation. Leaving the light burning, I crept under the coverlet as I was, and fell into a profound sleep.

XVIII

I BEGIN ANOTHER FOLLY

I OPENED my eyes to a sense of utter restfulness and peace. A feeling of green isolation, of a quiet and guarded security, such as not all Gogo's watchfulness could accomplish for me in the tower, came instantly to comfort the first startled shock of my waking. Little demure clouds drifted over the skylight; I heard a faint twitter of birds on the hillside; there were woodland berries and flaming leaves in my room; pictures, too; and a dozen pretty attentions to reassure me. Sure he must have made very certain of his capture before he decorated the cage so handsomely. And for how long, pray, had he held his hand and aloof, biding his opportunity? He must have kept his secret well, at least, for I had never known a hint of his presence.

I smiled, and closed my eyes again. It was a most endearing thought, the thought of that brotherly haunting, while I had been bemoaning my abandonment by all the world. There was still that in me, then, to attract admiration, to ensure my affinity with the strong and shapely. I was sick to death of malformations, mental and bodily. What had become of him? I had not reached the end of my resentment, but I did not wish him to think it insurmountable; and I was certainly curious to learn how far my romantic memory of him was justified.

And, in the meantime, where was I? in what remote eyrie of the green forest? For all I could see, I might be imprisoned in a well.

I rose, and, after making my toilette, had paused

undecided, wondering what was to come next, when I heard his voice, very mock-humble, at the trap—

“Little sister, will you come down to breakfast?”

The blood thrilled in my temples, but I hardened my heart, and answered “Yes,” as frigid as a nun.

He flung up the hatch at once, and for the first time I saw the ladder going down into candlelight, whence a smell of warm dust and tallow rose to my nostrils. He descended before me, and I followed, into the leanest of little cellars, with a rough board on trestles in it and a stool or two. The rafters were hung with cobwebs; there were a couple of dismal dips in horn sconces on the walls; a closed door showed dimly at the farther end, and that was all.

I turned in amazement upon my companion, to find him regarding me with a curious expression. But it sobered at once before my gaze. It was not, indeed, now I came to con him, quite the expression of my memory. The sweet humour of it had fallen, I could have thought, upon more mocking times. There was a look in his face as if he had got to love himself the better, the worse he had been depreciated by others; as if injustice had somewhat crooked the old lines of chivalry. But for the rest, he was as bronzed and comely as ever, as lithe and muscular; and the common woodman’s dress (coarse grogram jacket and leggings to the hips), which, whether for convenience or disguise, he had adopted, showed off his fine figure to perfection.

“Where is it, the breakfast?” I asked.

“Cooking, by Portlock,” said he. “I’m waiting to pull it through.”

He stood stooping, indeed, and holding a string in his hand, by what looked like a black gap at the foot of the wall beyond the table.

“To pull it through!” I cried out. “Are we to eat it here?”

He turned his head, as he leaned, to scan me.

"We can take it up under the skylight, if you like," said he.

"My room!"

A violent retort was on my lips; but something in his face warned me, and it died unuttered. For all his affected humility, there was a masterfulness here I had not guessed. I realised on the instant that I did not know, had never known him. It was not altogether a disagreeable awakening.

I sat down, silent, on one of the stools; and he addressed me again quietly from his place—

"Little sister, you have committed yourself to my care—very properly, I think, and very properly trustful of an elder brother. Do you know my age? I am thirty-four—just double your seventeen; and at least worldly-wise enough to direct you."

"That is all very well," I said, half stifled; "but why have you brought me here?"

"Have I not told you?" he answered. "To save you from a wolf, who would have set his teeth in my little white lamb."

"No, you have not told me," I cried, "and I am no more lamb of yours than his; and anyhow, I had my shepherd already."

"A poor shepherd," he said. "Witness his watchfulness!"

I bit my lip, and said no more. For a moment I hated myself and him—his specious reasonings, which had led me to abandon my honest, good comrade and saviour. While I sat dumb, a low whistle sounded through the wall; and instantly he turned to me.

"You do not like your dining-parlour?" he said. "But, believe me, it has a thousand conveniences of privacy, of which here is not the least."

And, with the word, drawing on the string he held in his hand, he brought a tray into light. It was packed with comestibles—bread, and honey, and collops of venison that smelt royally; but, when he

transferred these to the table, I had no stomach for them, and pushed away the plate he offered me.

"What! You won't eat?" he said.

"I can't breakfast in a sewer."

"Very well."

He fell to himself, without further delay, and with plenty of appetite. I watched him out of the corners of my eyes, half maddened already by the abstinence I had imposed on myself. He was dressed like a forester, I have said; and now I observed that he affected the manners of a forester, consciously, it would seem, effacing in himself the more gentle observances. It may have been an effort to him; but, anyhow, he tore his bread and gnawed his bones with the air of one bred to the soil—with a set of perfect white teeth, too, it must be conceded. And, while he despatched, throwing his litter on the board, he continued talking to me fitfully.

"Yes," he said, "it is very convenient for such as we, who desire not only to save our labour, but our lives ~~certainly~~, and our self-respect if possible. You don't ask me where we are?"

I shook my head in indifference.

"Well," he said, "you must know some time, when you might be more curious; and short explanations suit me best. We are immured, child, in a wall; and so long as we don't betray ourselves, nothing can betray us—not even into an acknowledgment of what one of us may owe to the other."

"I am grateful to you," I said coldly, and said no more. The truth is, I was hardly listening to him, so intense had grown my desire that he would coax me at last into eating something.

He laughed, and, pushing his plate away, settled his fists on his hips, and began, like a satisfied man, to troll a soft little song. I could stand it no longer.

"Give me a little piece," I said, "and I will show you how collops should be eaten."

"You mean," he answered at once, "that you will show me how to behave. But I have done with all that hypocrisy."

He rose with the words, having finished, and, to my anger and astonishment, cleared the board, piecemeal and deliberately, and, piling all on the tray, gave the signal for its withdrawal. It disappeared instantly. Then he returned to his stool, and, pulling out pipe and tobacco, began to smoke placidly. Fury overcame me.

"Have you not forgotten to ask my permission?" I cried.

"Punctilio in a sewer!" he answered, puffing; "that is hardly to be expected."

I rose at once.

"I wish to be by myself," I said.

He took his pipe from his lips.

"You know the way. If you object to mine, there is the ladder in your room—and the skylight—and all the forest to choose from"—and he began to smoke again.

I left him, without another word, and, ascending to my closet, dropped the trap with a slam. It was an outrage beyond endurance. I threw myself upon my bed, and wept tears of rage. What a fool I had been, what a fool, to commit my destinies to a savage! I had thought romance had come to find me, walking on two feet in the starlight, and all the time it had been leaving me, stumping sorrowfully away on its poor wooden legs. My soul gushed out in fresh mourning for the dear monster I had wronged.

More than once I rose, in the full determination to fly and rejoin him. As often, the hopelessness of my position cast me down again. I had no idea where I was; I dared not face the prospect of wandering, lost and alone, in those savage solitudes. The wretch had played his part well—and for what? Why for me.

The thought, at last, quieted my grief—brought me to a little reason. After all, I had been cold with him, something less than grateful. What had brought him to repudiate the customs of his caste? I fell into a fit of speculation. Perhaps it was in scorn of an order that had basely disinherited him. His words had seemed to imply so. Perhaps he had meant no more than to read me a lesson in feeling.

I sighed. I was wilful and imperious, I knew, I said to myself. I had been spoilt a little, perhaps, by admiration, and my better qualities obscured. It was a wonder he could have seen anything to covet in me. Was it my part to convince him of his mistake?

I sighed again, and then rose and walked about. Every detail of the tiny chamber was witness to the loving expectations he had formed of me. What was I to do? How climb down and keep my place in my own eyes?

He meant to leave me to resolve the question for myself, it appeared. All day I waited and hungered, and not a sound of his footstep approaching did I hear. At length, when it was dark, quite desperate I took my candle, and, softly opening the trap, listened a moment, and descended. The cellar was empty; only the board and stools, and nothing else. I went swiftly scanning it, holding the light overhead. I tried the door at the end; it was fast locked. Unless he had gone out that way, there was no accounting for his disappearance.

All at once I heard the thin mutter of voices—his and another's, I was sure. Seeking to localise them, I came upon the low hole in the wall through which he had dragged the breakfast tray. I stooped, and hearing, I thought, the whisper clearer, sunk to my knees and looked through. Here was a passage, I found to my surprise, wide enough for a man to creep by; and, beyond, it seemed, a faintly lighted room. As I bent, I heard the chairs of the talkers drag, as if the two were rising, and, fearful of discovery, fled

on tiptoe to my room once more, and, noiselessly closing the trap, stood panting and rigid by it. To what dark mystery was I being made the innocent and unconscious accessory? I felt suddenly bewildered and terrified. The light in my hand swayed and leaped, evoking gusty phantoms on the wall. A wind seemed to boom in my brain. I was really light-headed with hunger, I think. Presently, from sheer giddiness, I threw myself on my bed once more, and fell into a sort of waking stupor.

In the midst, after how long I know not, a voice reached me. He was summoning me, if I needed it, to supper. If I needed it! What cruelty! He would not give my pride a chance. Half in fear, half fury, I turned my face to the wall, and did not answer.

He wasted no time on me. I heard him withdraw in a moment, whistling. I had hoped he would think me escaped; would venture in, perhaps, panic-struck, to encounter the full torrent of my indignation. But he showed no concern whatever. He felt secure of his wretched little trapped bird, I supposed. And he was justified—was justified. Then I cried as I had never cried before. He might have had some patience, some consideration. At last, quite famished and exhausted, I fell asleep.

I awoke, in full day, to find him standing over and regarding me. I felt weak, and too utterly subdued to resent his presence as it deserved. There was no pity in his eyes even then. I closed my own, feeling my throat swell.

"I thought you might be hungry," he said. "Are you?"

At that, for all my efforts, the tears came.

"Don't you know?" I said. "But I suppose you think to starve me into submission."

"Submission to what?" said he. "You were offered food, and refused it. But I have brought you some bread."

He held out to me a dry crust. I turned from it in anger.

"O, very well!" said he, and was returning it to his pocket.

Then physical need conquered me. I could not face the thought of another day's starvation. I sat up, and held out my hands.

"If you will be so cruel," I said. "Let me have it, please."

He gave it to me at once, stood by with a sort of sombre smile on his face, while I appeased my ravenous first hunger.

"That's right," he said. "Are you better? There was room for improvement."

I did not answer.

"Well, are you quite good now?" said he.

My throat began to swell again.

"You treat me like a child!" I cried.

"Yes," he said, "because it's only little girls who quarrel with their bread and butter."

"Haven't you punished me enough already?" I said.

"I don't know," he answered. "But, if more's wanted, I hope it will be with less smart to myself."

I laughed through my tears.

"O, I mean nothing sentimental," said he; "but only that, *my* room being next to yours, and the common ladder to both conducting through *your* room, I've been forced by your wilfulness to sleep all night below in a chair. But we'll remedy that somehow with a screen, and so settle any question of precedence in going to bed."

I stared at him, half fearfully.

"Why have you brought me here?" I whispered.

"What! again?" he said, shaking a finger at me.

"It seems, for no reason but to humble and abuse me. I was happy with poor Gogo."

"Damn Gogo!" he said, in such a sudden heat that it brought a cry from me. Then, all in an instant, to my

amazement and distress, he had fallen on his knees beside the bed.

"What is Gogo to you, or you to him?" he cried, in a low, intense voice. "Has he ruined himself for you as I have done? Has he risked death, destruction, madness? pined for you in dreams, and plotted to gain you waking, as I have ever since you, a child, took my reason by storm, and bound it to you by golden chains?"

His fervour and passion quite overwhelmed me. I could only cower, trembling, before him.

"What do you mean?" I whispered. "How have you ruined yourself—for my sake?"

He caught at my hands. He was breathing fast and thick.

"O, child, you don't know!" he cried—"the peril that has dogged you—the love that has foreseen and provided—not for a moment the truth of how my heart bled to hurt you. Now—now! O, will you not come to me and hear?"

"No," I whispered, in a hurry of emotion. "For pity's sake leave me! I will come to you presently: I will, indeed."

He rose to his feet at once, commanding himself. He was all changed—softened and transfigured. I felt swimming on the edge of a whirlpool—fighting giddily against some helpless, rapturous plunge to which I was being urged. I longed only for breathing time—some little space to be alone in.

He went and stood by the trap: "I will wait for you," he said hoarsely; and so descended, closed it behind him, and was gone.

When, in an hour, I rejoined him, he was pacing the cellar like a caged wolf. He uttered a glad exclamation upon seeing me, and took my hand and led me to a stool. He was himself again, but with a new strange wistfulness in his gaiety.

"You will not mind the 'sewer' now?" said he. "And presently you will ask me everything, and I will tell you."

He drew in our breakfast, by the same method as before ; and I could at last enjoy my collops with a free conscience and appetite. Then, our meal over, he drew his stool beside me, and, without offering to smoke, started upon his relation.

XIX

I AM MAID MARIAN

"BUT, first," said he, kindling, "ask me where you are."

"Short explanations suit me best," I said. "Im-mured in a wall. Is not that enough?"

"Quite, for me," said he, "since you are here. But whose wall, now?"

I shook my head.

"Why, in Ranger Portlock's cottage," said he, "buried, out of all whooping, in the forest. Would you like to be introduced to your host?"

"Yes, if you please," I said. "Will you call him in?"

He laughed.

"Mahomet will have to go to the mountain. You will understand why, when you see it. Well, for this cottage. Did you mark its position in the dark? Poor little bewildered brain—poor little brain! Harkee!" (He was fondly touching and smoothing the hair on my temples.) "I loved this Diana as a little girl. What a phenomenal brother, to be sure! This cottage you are in, child—did you not observe?—lies snuggled in the shoulder of the hill, warm as a baby in its mother's arm—as warm and as safe too. Its back wall here" (he turned and tapped the plaster) "is just a windowless buttress, built strong against any chance falling of the soil beyond. This" (he pointed to the inner wall) "terminates the kitchen, and not the house itself, as a body entering the building is meant to suppose. 'Tis a blind, as one might call it, and not discernible from the outside to any but a conjurer."

"And there?" I said, pointing to the closed door at the end.

"That, madam," said he, with some momentary return to dryness, "is Bluebeard's Chamber, if you please, and not at present in the articles of discussion."

I was surprised—a little startled, perhaps—but said no more; and he went on—

"Well, now: this same cottage is a half-timbered structure, very ancient, and as full of odd little compartments as a bureau. Where we lie is its secret drawers, Diana, a nest of 'em—two below and two over. And how to reach here, miss? Ay, there's the master stroke you'd never guess. No, 'tis no way by the door yonder."

"If you please, sir," says I, "if 'twas left to my innocence to decide, I should e'en choose the way the tray went."

"Well, come and look," says he, and made me go and stoop to the hole. To my surprise, it was closed, and black.

"'Twas not so I saw it last night," I said, rising.

"What!" cried he, "you were prowling, were you? Thank you kindly for the hint"—and he gave a great laugh, but sobered in a moment.

"Did you listen, then?" said he.

"I was going to," I answered; "but the moment I bent, your chairs moved, and I was frightened, and ran away."

"That sounds frank," said he. He sat musing a little. "You're a child, 'tis true, mutable and thoughtless; but where could be the harm? If the secret were mine only— Well, study for my confidence, and some day, perhaps"—

He broke off with a smile, which I had a difficulty to return. So there *was* a mystery in reality. There and then I vowed a Delilah oath to myself to get the better of it.

"I don't know what you mean," I said; "I had no

thought to surprise any secrets. Is that the way through, indeed?"

"Yes," he said; "fairly, it is. 'Tis pierced under the big copper in the kitchen, which has a detachable grate to be pulled all out in one piece. God knows the original use of this contrivance—this space in the wall—unless 'twere always for the purpose that we"—(he checked himself again). "Anyhow, 'tis utterly inaccessible else, save by way of the skylight which your ladyship knows; and now you're acquainted with your prison, ask me further what you will."

"*Ranger Portlock*, did you say?"

"Ay, ranger; once my brother's keeper (not like Cain, unhappily), and since promoted."

"You seem to love your brother."

"I have reason."

"And this Portlock is still in his service?"

"Yes."

"And in *your* confidence?"

"Ay, is he not! I must tell you I am a proper sportsman, madam, and always more popular with Hardrough's people than the noble verderer himself. Well, I have taught them something here and there, and put money in their pockets, maybe. Have no fear. Not Portlock nor any other will betray us. I have my merry men of Down, who sink or swim with me. And now I have my Maid Marian. What more? You shall see this Portlock. Bear in mind he was once a thread-paper of a man. I have known him since I was a boy. What else?"

"Can you ask me?" I said low, hanging my head. "The reason—what you hinted up there—why you are ruined and in hiding?"

He ventured to put an arm about me. How could I refuse him, who was my Bayard? Yet, when he told me, it was not all. He never to the end acquainted me of what social dereliction of his had originally delivered him into the earl his brother's power, and placed him and his remnant fortunes under the hand of that

remorseless nobleman to use and crush at his will. He never even admitted but indirectly that stain on his birth, in which a high person was whispered to be implicated, and which was at the root, perhaps, of all the trouble.

"He always hated me," he said of the Lord Herring; "and never more than when he foresaw my succession in the death of his promising limb, my nephew."

"What, is he dead?" I asked, astonished.

"No," he said, "but only rotten. He will never come into the title, believe me."

"And you," I said, curiously interested. "How will he keep you out, if the worst should happen to him?"

"Why," he said, "he would threaten an inquiry, an exposure; and there are those who, rather than suffer it, would countenance his quiet disposal of me—have done so, perhaps, already. And there you come in."

"Me!" I cried.

"Child," he responded, "how can I speak it without offence? You have long been marked down by this man, my brother, for his prey. I have known it, trust me, and writhed under the knowledge. But you were in proper hands, and he must bide his opportunity. Believe me, he was no privy to Sophia's schemes of husbandry. Had he guessed, he would have anticipated the end, so far as you was concerned, by carrying you away by force. When he learned the truth at last, he was mad. But he recovered his sanity on reflection. It was no bad thing to let you ripen in that hell for his purposes—to subdue you by that torture to his will. Then, when reduced, he would exchange your sweet person with Dr. Peel for mine, would sell me to your place in the madhouse, so killing his two birds with one wicked stone. But his plan miscarried. I had a friend in the household—someone, a poor dancer, whom he had used for a day and thrown aside. She revealed all to me, and I fled, leaving him only my bitter curse for

legacy. And I came here, into hiding, to mature my plans for revenge—came back to Nature, renouncing my kindred and all the vile social policies of a world I had got to loathe. He had beggared me, and I would fleece the plunderer. He had thought to debauch my love, and I would disappoint him of even that moiety of his bargain. Have I done so? Judge, if he loved me before, how he would spare me now, who have baffled his schemes and stolen his dear! A knowledge of but half the truth has already, in these few weeks, set him turning every stone to discover where I lie; but I am well served by my friends. He would burn the forest if he guessed the whole. As you regard me; as you value yourself, child, concede nothing to chance—not so much as a peep over the roof. Ay, I know your activity. But you must lie close as a hare if you would be safe—through these first days of peril, at least. Later, when the chase less presses, you may venture out, perhaps, by the ladder; but always with infinite caution, as you love me. Little sister, do you agree?”

I buried my face in my hands. My whole heart cried out on the cruel tyranny of a code that could let such monsters as this wreak their passions on the pure and innocent, and yet find absolution. O, that I could find a way, in the lawful junction of our fortunes, to vindicate this dear oppressed creature, and establish him in his rights before the world! I leaned to him, with wet eyes.

“If you love *me* so, brother,” I murmured, “what made you behave so cruel to me?”

He gave a happy, low laugh, and tightened his hold.

“Why, dear,” he said, “are not a woman’s extremes of love all for the man who will beat her, or the man she can cherish and protect? I vow I chose only my natural part.”

“Well,” said I, “I’m glad you stopped short of the beating. It would only have stiffened me, like cream.”

"Whipt cream is very good with cherries," said he, and bent to my lips.

But I started from him gaily, and leapt to my feet.

"Come," I said; "I'm waiting to be introduced to Mr. Portlock."

He laughed, and stretched himself, and, rising, stooped to the hole in the wall and scratched with his finger, like a rat gnawing, on the iron stop therein. In a little something was withdrawn, and a weak wash of light flowed through.

"Now," said he, "I will go first, and do you follow, little mouse."

He dropped on his hands and knees, and crawled in, and disappeared. It was an attitude that lacked romance, and I was glad there was none behind to witness my passing. But the journey was so short that I was hardly in before my head was free on the farther side; and in a moment George had helped me to my feet, and I saw our host.

I saw nothing else, indeed. There were, I believe, the open range, and herb-hung rafters, and settle and dresser of the ordinary cottager's kitchen. The huge creature before me absorbed three-fourths of the field of my vision. I understood at once why Mahomet must come to the mountain.

He had an enormous tallowy face, had this person, with an expression so excessively melting that it might have been said to be no expression at all. He could have had no more intimacy with his own skeleton than a hippopotamus. Ages ago he must have left it buried within himself as useless, and turned his wits to balancing on the twin globes of fat that were his legs. His eyes were slits, his nose a wart, his mouth the mere orifice of a blow-pipe. If his neck by any possibility had been broken, one might have stretched it till his head touched the ceiling.

I was conscious of George standing by watching me, and instinctively I dropped a curtsy. Immediately the

mountain rumbled, and dusted a chair for my reception. It swung in his vast hand like a signboard from an inn. Relatively, I had some fear of sitting on it; it looked for a moment so like a doll's.

"Mr. Portlock," I murmured, casting down my eyes, "I—I am your humble servant, sir."

He bowed—bagged, would be the better expression. The whole weight of his chin was against his recovery; but he managed it, with an effort.

"You—you are very good to give me shelter," said I. "I'm afraid we—we shall crowd you dreadfully, sir."

A low gale vibrated in him somewhere. I seemed to be able to detach certain indistinct utterances from it, of which "welcome: what can do: Maid Marian" were the clearest.

I made an effort to respond fitly—struggled, and was dumb. Then, in a moment—I saw George with his hand to his mouth—the demon exploded in me.

"Were you—were you always like that?" I shrieked, and fell across my chair-back, half hysteric.

The poor fellow may have laughed himself—there was no guessing what emotions that curtain of flesh concealed—but he looked, if anything, more abashed than offended.

"Hush!" said George, recovering himself, "or I must drag you back, miss."

We shook, facing one another with gleaming eyes and teeth.

"Didn't I tell you," he gasped, "that he was a thread-paper of a man once?"

He went and clapped a hand on the mountain's shoulder.

"Come, Johnny, no offence," said he. "None knows better than her ladyship that your heart's in the right place"

I subdued myself by a vast effort, and rose, and went to conciliate the poor creature.

"Haven't I reason to?" I said. "And—and I put

my faith in you, sir ; and—and faith moves mountains ” —and I was near off again.

He shifted, and flushed faintly, and delivered himself once more.

“ ’Tis the wittles—have done it.”

“ He means,” said George, “ that he’s made up for lost time and opportunities, since his promotion.”

“ Ay, ’twas the nerves,” went on the oracle—“ kep’ me down—once. Shook, I did—hear thunder. Walk a mile round—avoid row. When the crows holloa’d—see funeral pass—turned blood water. ’Twas lack ballast—that was it.”

“ Of course,” said George, “ that was it. What a coward you was, Johnny, in your thin time. D’you remember the day we shot the home covers, with a great person for company, and the sky came raining cobwebs, so that we were near stifled with ’em; and you stuck your head in a bush, till we gave you with our ramrods something better than cobwebs to roar about?”

“ Ay, I do,” said the mountain, and rumbled again. “ Not much cobweb—’bout me now.”

Well, I told him that one couldn’t have too much of a good thing; and very soon we were fast friends. But that morning George haled me back into shelter before much was said, and afterwards our acquaintance ripened by fits and starts. The very immobility of the creature was our and his salvation. There was no conscious expression to betray itself on that vast desert of a countenance. Periodically, he was visited by the steward; fitfully, by units of the hunt which his lordship sought to lay on his vanished brother’s trail. He was never, so far as I knew, suspected; and with the deepening of winter the chase slackened.

And, in the meantime, what was I doing there, buried alive like a recreant novice in the wall? Wilt thou believe, Alcide, that I, with all my free aspirations, could have remained at peace in the little prison for a

day? Well, with rare excursions beyond, and those not till I had been long immured, I lived there for more than a year, and was near all the time as happy as a swallow under the eaves. It is love makes the dimensions of our estate.

XX

I PUT AN END TO FOLLY NUMBER TWO

IT was not till early in the second spring of my idyll that the clouds began to darken, and my conscience to stir uneasily in those gloomy last hours before the final waking. Many things had contributed to this state, some cardinal, but most, no doubt, indifferent—mere little tributary streams which had come to swell the volume of my disenchantment. Misunderstanding, alas! does not walk to challenge us on the highway. It spies from behind hedges, and listens at keyholes; and when at length its tally of grievances is made, we wonder at the weight of the evidence it has accumulated.

Late in the previous year I had been very ill. During the worst of my disorder an unconscionable old hag, some withered afreet of the forest, who was in the secret of our retreat, had been brought in to attend me. She disappeared soon, thank God, in a whisk of sulphur; and thereafter George nursed me devotedly. But, strangely enough, as I grew convalescent I developed an odd impatience of him, which rose by degrees to a real intolerance and dislike. That feeling abated as I grew strong, but never to such degree as to make us again quite the friends we had been. He made some study to propitiate me, even to the extent of renouncing those ridiculous principles of "Nature," which he had affected to exchange for the whole sum of social accommodations. It was a relief, though an aggravation, to have him refine himself again out of a savage, since I no longer could find the entertainment I once had in

the dear *poseur*. Orson, in truth, was never so little attractive as when, for the sake of tired love's favour, he confessed his ruggedness a humbug. His recantation, though welcome enough in one way, only disillusioned me in another. So long as he had been consistent, he was absolute; now his weakness had made me so. I remembered the times when I had pleaded with him, and had found him only more covetable in his inaccessibility to my arguments.

"We can't return to Nature, in the sense of rudeness," I had often said to him, "any more than we can recover our childhood. We have grown out of it, and there's an end. A man playing the child is only sorry make-believe; or, if it isn't, the man's an idiot. Nature herself, you see, isn't stationary: she's always refining on her first conceptions."

"What!" he would protest, grumbling; "is all that hypocrisy of 'breeding,' that high *goût*, which is so fastidious in its appetite for crawling meats, and rotten policies, and bruised virtues, Nature?"

"Yes, to be sure," I would answer: "'tis *human* nature—the fruits of her desire to hasten her social apotheosis by a union with the sons of God."

"Ay," would growl my Timon—"the fruits of incontinence."

"I don't see it," I would cry. "I can't see but that a knife and fork are in the right succession to a beak. We may use our fingers, you will say. Would you wish me, sir, to fondle my love with the same hands I tear my meat withal? No, you wouldn't—except for the sake of argument,—and therefore I protest I am the truer child of that little liaison. *Vive la Nature!* say I; the Nature who is my mother, and the God who is my father. They have taught me between them to study, in studying myself, to make the gift of prettiness to my neighbours."

"And I swear you are a dutiful child," he would answer, with the readiness that made me love him.

"O, believe me, sir!" I would cry; "there is nothing

artificial about the civilisation you have professed to renounce—as if that were responsible for your downfall. On its main lines it always makes for beauty”—

“Which is truth, I suppose,” he would interrupt with a sneer.

“Which is truth, as much as anything is,” I would reply. “Truth is only a cant word for what we don’t understand; and, if we could get to, there would be an end of all fun in the world.”

“O, upon my word, you are a very learned minx!” he would crow; but I would continue, not minding him—

“If we had to start again from the beginning, don’t tell me but that we should develop the very same conventions as now, or at least near ’em. Why, sir, not to lean our elbows on the table, for instance, while we sup our tea, isn’t a tyrannous edict of society. ’Tis a natural recognition of the unhandsome; a natural effort to qualify ourselves for the better company we all look to some day. Don’t we all feel that we are only rehearsing here for a greater piece? Well, for my part, I don’t want to be damned in it. But you—you cry, like a poor actor, ‘Leave me alone to my pipe and beer. I shall be all right on the night itself!’”

Then he would laugh bravo; and, pulling out his tobacco, silence me with a kiss.

But now—well, he had abdicated, and I ruled, that was the difference.

There had been a time when I would have consolidated the understanding between us by taking, on the first dawn of liberty, our friendship to church. In those days, indeed, I even hinted as much to him, touching upon the duty he owed me so to establish my innocence with the world. Then he would fall back upon his cant of Nature; of vows dishonoured in her sight; of laws that crossed the plainest mandate that ever she had given to earth. And I must be content at the time, because we were helpless outcasts together, because he was kind

to me, because he flattered me with a thousand attentions which made me forget the equivocalness of my position.

But now, at the last, it was he must sue and I be cold. For, under our altered relations, I had come to recognise, though late, how wrong was this continued communion, however platonic, between us. It was not that I loved my brother less, but that I respected myself more. I had been blinded by all the novelty and glamour. He was pagan at heart, I saw, and I was at heart religious. My thoughts turned with affection to the quiet nunnery at Wellcot. I longed to see my~kind again, to recover something of the world I had lost. I had no real faith in his protestations, no real belief that, should it ever chance to him to recover his rights—which, in truth, seemed impossible—he would claim me to my legitimate share in them. And I found no room in my world for a paradise of sinful loves.

He sighed much, and was very pathetic, poor fellow, over my changed attitude, and wearied me to death. Then he took to verse, and depressed me more. He had a strange faculty for a sort of big-sounding line, which he would invent and declaim in his odd moments while engaged over mending his snares or sewing buttons on his gaiters. It was quite impressive in its place, but was not exhilarating when applied to *les amours*.

“This world” (he declared once) “is but the weed-heap of the spheres,

Whereon we rot and fester, torn from the skies,
And are consumed in fire, to manure
And quicken old fields of heaven with new love.
O, sweet! wind with me on the damnéd pile,
So of our mingled dust shall blossom heaven”—

A romantic use to put your poor little Diana to, eh, my friend? But, indeed, I would have none of it. I hate that fashion of decrying the flesh, because your poet has a stomachache. My body is the

only certain God I know in the midst of these shadows. I cling to it, worshipping it with all the pretty gifts I can think. When it goes, where shall I be? Seeking and crying for it again through space. I will not have it abused to such uses, my sweet body that I love so.

Well, it had all vastly interested me once: the fond, comical incongruity; the unexpected soul of my Nimrod revealing itself through suffering. He did not, dear simpleton, in the least understand his own inconsistency: how, loving all birds and beasts, as he professed to do, and so claiming affinity with Nature, he could use and approve the latest engines of civilisation for their slaughter. He called the red deer "the spirit of the antlered tree," and went to shoot it with a gun. He made me a pretty waistcoat of squirrel skins (I went sweetly befurred, indeed, throughout the cold winters), and dwelt lovingly on the primeval romance of woodlands, meaning, in fact, that rapture of flight and pursuit of visible things which alone appeals to the unredeemed barbarian. In the end, to speak truth, his mad rhapsodies came to remind me, only too uncomfortably, of the dead astrologer; and I looked askance on what seemed a common derivation from a crazy stock.

But now, lest it appear that I attach too much importance to these minor discords, let me relate of the much darker and more formidable shadow which had arisen between us, and which, as the months but added to its density, grew at last to be the insuperable barrier to our reconciliation.

It was the *secret* dividing us—the secret which I had once half surprised, and to the existence of which he had virtually confessed, only, it seemed, to torture me by withholding it. This much alone I knew: that he went somehow practising, in his banishment, to be revenged on the society which he held responsible for it. Often, at first, I tried to coax the truth from

him. He was not, for all his love, to be beguiled. There were others concerned, he said, who by no means shared his faith in my discretion; with whom, in fact, he had come to open dispute on the subject of my continued sojourn in the cottage, and whom, in the end, he had had to propitiate—seeing his safety lay in their hands—by a vow to reveal nothing to me.

I had no doubt, in my heart, but that these unknown were the “merry men” of his boasting—woodmen, verderers, perhaps, who—treacherous to the earl their master—were aiding and abetting the exile in those very malpractices he concealed from me. I was right as to that, it appeared; but what I could never understand was the nature of my reputation with them: how they had so learned to misapprehend my character for faith and loyalty. However, mistaken as they were, they had nothing to complain of their leader’s constancy to his oath—a constancy, alas! which I can only not commend because of its miserable sequel. If he had only had the strength to trust me, neither would he have lost his liberty, nor I been condemned to the torments of a quite unmerited remorse. At this date of time, I can insist, with a clear but sorrowful conscience, that the poor infatuated fool brought what happened upon his own head.

When I recognised at last that he was adamant to my pleadings, I waived the subject, but not by any means my private concern in it. The secret, I was naturally enough convinced, lay to be revealed behind the locked door of that Bluebeard Chamber; and one night—after my friend had gone out—I took a taper and my courage in hand, and descended softly through the trap to investigate.

After he had gone out, I say; and therein lay the key to my growing apprehensions. For not many days had I been in hiding before I discovered that my comrade was a night-walker. He would wait,

soft-shut into his room, until he fancied I was drowned in sleep, then list-footed creep out and by the screen—which he had put up to protect me—and either descend by way of the trap, or, less often, mounting the ladder which communicated with the hidden gully, disappear, and pull his means of exit after him. Then I would wait, shivering and wondering through the whole gamut of formless fears, till stupor overtook me, or perhaps by and by, after long hours, a terrified half-consciousness of his stealthy return.

Where did he thus nightly go? To what dark business or witches' frolic? I tormented my brain for the solution, and of my love and loyalty could find none. But the poison of a yet-unrealised fear was working in me early.

Now, on this night, waking out of tormented dreams, I was on the instant desperate to solve the mystery. But hardly had I crossed the little cellar when a warning rumble from Portlock, seated in the room beyond, told me that I was discovered. So this vast creature was in the conspiracy! Quite panic-struck, I fled, and, mounting to my room—found George there. He had returned, descending by the ladder, during the minute of my absence.

He made no allusion whatever to my escapade; but just laughed softly, and took my cold hand in his, as I stood trembling and aghast before him.

"Poor little maid," he said; "she has been dreaming"—and he led me to my bed, and tucked me in warm, and left me with a kiss.

I never thought it necessary to confess; but always after that, as I came to learn, he descended by the trap and *bolted it behind him*.

That did not assuage my fears, though it was some comfort henceforth to be spared the pretence of blindness to his flittings—a comfort, I think, to him as well as to me, though his silence on the main point was not to be broken. Ah! if he had only

had the courage to set my mind at rest, before its fears grew to a frenzy beyond my control!

Now, as time went on, my hearing grew morbidly acute—during the dark hours of his nightly absences, when I was fastened lonely and frightened into my attic, and sleep refused to come to me—to certain shufflings and whisperings—sounds scarce to be distinguished from the wind and the rain—which filtered to me from the depths below. Sometimes it would seem a sigh of blown voices; sometimes a suggestion of *dragging*; sometimes the low rumble of a cart on the turf, which set my pulses knocking in my ears. Then when, succeeding an ominous silence, George's step would come mounting stealthily by the trap, on tiptoe thence to his room, I would shudder in the thought of dreadful footprints going by my screen, and would feign the deep-breathing of slumber, lest he should be moved to stop and call to me softly in the voice I had not yet learned to resist.

And so at last, out of all this torment of apprehension, out of the sleepless waitings and breathless listenings, had emerged a spectre, real and present in the end, to whose whispered hauntings I had long struggled to close my ears; whose approach I had sought to stay, beating my hands in air; whose name I had not dared to breathe to myself. And it was MURDER.

Yes, murder. So only, and only so, was logically expounded that perverted creed of Nature. Livid, terrifying, his hands stained with blood, I saw him in its ghastly glair; saw him savagely wreaking on the social order the wrongs he had suffered at its hands; saw him reverted to the beast he worshipped, tearing his kind, a common robber and assassin.

I will not say that I was convinced and overwhelmed in a breath. For long the hideous shadow of the phantom was poor proof against the sun of present love; would thin, attenuate to a mere gross mist in the light

of kind embraces, and honest laughter, and a manly candour—on all, alas ! but the subject that most corroded. Only when that later spectre of our estrangement crept between, did it assume a dreadful complexion, glooming through the other. And so, at last, the appalling confirmation.

It had been for weeks a terror to me to creep by the secret passage into Portlock's kitchen, on the rare occasions when my brief visits there, for the sake of some small change and play of liberty, were invited. For the hole entered close by the locked door, which had come to figure to me for the seal on all most nameless horrors ; and I could not pass it by but with averted head, and nostrils held from breathing, and a sickness like to the death I felt it contained. Rather would I strain a little the chance of capture without ; and often now, when George was sleeping—for he lay late after his night excursions—I would put the ladder to the hill, and climb, and wander in the hidden furrow above, sometimes as far as the gravel-pit, and there indulge my misery, daring even at the worst a thought of escape. For at length, so far as we knew, the chase of us had ceased altogether, and Portlock was no longer interrogated for possible information.

Wandering thus, greatly unhappy, my thoughts would often recur for shelter to the peaceful nunnery ; to my little loving Patty, the dearest pleader of a sister's repentance ; most, and with a self-humbling remorse, to the faithful, unexacting soul whom I had deserted in the tower. What if I had been misled by specious arguments to wound incurably where I had wrought to cure ? Could I ever in that case forgive the false advocate ? O, surely there was a greater Nature than she in whose name were perpetrated deeds of violence and reprisal ? There was the human, the humorous, the tolerant large philosophy of being which Gogo had revealed in his story of himself. *His* misfortunes had but made him forswear the false goddess in whom weaker men sought to justify their passions. I could never think of

him but as the Pan of these later days—the poor limping Pan of our era, beguiled into a hospital, and persuaded to an operation, and shorn of his limp and his legs together. One might meet him begging on a city bridge, and look wondering down for the song of the water in the rushes that were not; one might read his hairy breast into dreams of red dead bracken, and see his eyes, under their matted brows, like little forest pools reflecting glimpses of the sky, and not guess who he was, for he would never whine of better days. He always took fortune like a fallen god, did Gogo. He always smelt sweet, did my monster. And he had not erred in love before he found me.

Could that be said of another? I was never quite able to forget that discarded favourite who had warned a threatened brother and assisted him to escape. Though I had never deigned to give the thought place in my mind, the unacknowledged shadow of it, of what had been her inducement to the act, slept in me, to rise presently and add its quota of darkness to the whole. I was very unhappy—very forlorn and tired and unhappy.

But, on that morning, as it blew bitter cold without, and I longed for the fire that was never ours in that chill cellar but by proxy of the chimney-back, I brought myself to go down, and scratch out the signal to Portlock to let me pass if it were practicable. He responded at once, drawing away the grate; and I crept in and through, and stood up on the farther side. Instantly a grumpy exclamation from him, as instantly clapped back with his great hand on his mouth, took my eyes to my skirt, whereto for a flash I had seen his directed. And there, smearing the pale folds of it, was a long, foul streak of blood.

“Where did this come from?” I cried in a dismayed voice, for the moment too shocked to reflect.

I fancied he shook upon his great gelatinous calves, that the little eyes set in the vast oyster of his face were blinking shiftily, alert to my movements while he turned over the dull masses of his brain for an answer.

"Rabbits—dinner," at length he rumbled.

But I had realised it all while he stuck fast. Desperate in my heart-sickness, I made a hurried step to pass him; and instantly he moved backwards, and filled the doorway into the little front parlour by way of which I had hoped to escape into the forest.

"Let me pass," I cried wildly. "I want air."

He pointed to the copper.

"Not safe. That way."

"I can't," I cried. "It was there I picked this up: you know it was." Then I quite lost my reason. "You are a murderer!" I shrieked. "You are all murderers here! You rob and kill, and drag the poor bodies through and hide them in the cellar behind the door. Let me pass—I can't live here—I can bear it no longer!"

I raved and cried; I beat helplessly on that huge drum of flesh. It stood stolid, insensible, completely stopping the aperture.

"Go—ask cap'en," was all it said.

I fell back from him on the word. The sense of an immediate necessity of self-control was flashed upon my consciousness. 'Above or below—either way my passage was guarded. I was between the devil and the deep sea; and, in an irrepressible burst of frenzy, I had confessed myself, let slip my tortured demon, and so, perhaps, spoken my own death-sentence. The terror of the thought drove out the lesser loathing. I must temporise—finesse.

"Yes," I said, "I will. I will not rest now till I know."

The return by that foul sewer, the fearful issue by the closed door, were experiences as horrible as any in my life. What crawling thread might not be still drawing from the obscure reservoir beyond? What hideous witness not fastening silent to me in the darkness, that it might rise with my rising and shriek to the light for vengeance? But I forced myself, in my mortal fear, to tread softly, and on very panic tiptoe climbed from the

hateful pit, and crossed the room above. I paused a moment, on my shuddering way, for assurance of *his* steady breathing; and then with cold deft hands set the ladder in place, and mounted it, and, drawing it after me into the thicket, fled along the passage. I had no thought of what I should do. I only wanted to escape: to put as long a distance as possible between myself and that spectre, confessed in all its blood-guiltiness at last. Half blinded, torn by flint and briar, I broke at length through the farther thicket, and sank, trembling and exhausted, upon the bank of the gravel-pit beyond.

I had sat there I know not how long, my face in my hands, the alarum in my heart deafening me to all outward sounds—the storming trees above; the cold sabre of the wind slashing into the bushes of my refuge, as if it would lay me bare—when suddenly I felt the clinch of a hand on my shoulder, and screamed, and looked up. Three fellows, in a common livery, had descended softly upon me from above, and I was captured without an effort.

I rose, staggering, to my feet, my face like ashes, my poor hands clasped in entreaty. But not a word could I force from my white lips.

“You must come with us, miss, if you please,” said the man who held me, civilly enough.

“Where?” I made out to whisper.

He pointed with a riding-whip. I followed the direction of his hand; and there, on the rim of the pit above, silhouetted against the sky, sat a single horseman. I had no reason to doubt who it was. Even at that distance, the lank red jaw of him was sign enough of the fox. I was trapped at last, and when I had thought myself securest.

Now, I do not know what desperate resignation came to me all in a moment. As well this way out as another. “Very well,” I said quietly, “I will go with you.”

They were surprised, I could see, by my submission,

and all the more alert, on its unexpected account, to hover about my going. But their strong arms were not the less considerate, for that reason, to support me, overwrought as I was, in my passage to the open daylight above; and, almost before I realised it, I was standing before the Earl of Herring.

He sat as stiff and relentless in his saddle as an Attila, his red eyes staring, a very wickedness of foretasted relish grinning in his hungry teeth. A fourth servant in livery stood a little apart, holding his own and the others' horses.

"So," said the master, whispering as out of a dream, "you are caught at last, my lady."

I felt for the first time a little flush come to my cheeks, and answered his gaze resolutely.

"I don't know what you mean by 'caught,' my lord," I said. "These are not the days of King John."

He rubbed his gloved hand across his chin.

"No, by God!" he said, with a hoarse chuckle. "But they are the days of King Hardrough, by your leave."

"I have done no wrong."

"Tell that to my lady," said he.

"Jealousy has no ears."

He gave a hyæna laugh.

"Misfortune has not chastened you, I see," crowed he.

"It has not tried to," I said, "till this moment. Now you have seen me, will you let me go, and ride back to tell Mrs. de Crespigny that she has nothing more to fear from my rivalry?"

He regarded me with a delighted humour.

"When I go, you come with me."

"O no!"

"O yes! straight back to Dr. Peel and his whippings."

"You will not—you will not!" I clasped my hands upon his knee in a frenzy of terror. I was quite

broken in a moment. "Don't send me back to that hell!" I implored.

He lusted over my fear. He could not for long bring himself to ease it.

"What have you got to offer me to stay my hand?" he said at last.

I was silent.

"Harkee!" he said. "I will help you out. Will you give me my bastard brother?"

"He is my brother too; I swear it."

"Pish!" said he; "will you give up your paramour?"

"Not if you call him by that name."

"Why, there, I knew," said he, "you was in hiding together somewhere. Smoke the red earl, if you can. Call him by what name you will, and lead me to him."

I hung my head, and burst into tears.

"He has deceived me."

"What did I say?"

"Not that—not that. If I betray him, 'tis only in the hope of his being persuaded to some reformation. You will not work him evil?"

"That I swear. 'Tis only that I want to keep him out of harm's way."

I looked up, breathless. This assurance was at least a comfort.

"What will you do with him?"

"Leave that to me. The question is, what has he done with you?"

How could I not answer him? To win my brother from this vileness—was it not worth the sacrifice of myself? With many tears and falterings, I told him the story of my sojourn in the verderer's cottage; of the secret chambers, and our life therein; finally, with bitter reluctance, of the shadow that had risen to estrange us, and the bloody confirmation of my fears that was to witness even now on my gown.

He grinned horribly over the revelation.

"That Portlock!" he rejoiced to himself; "that Portlock! A good throat for the hangman! But, for your murderings—I warrant 'tis a fatter bone I've to pick with our gentleman."

He fell into a little musing, scowling fit; then, suddenly dismounting, bade me get into his saddle.

"Where are you going to take me?" I said.

"Where," he answered, "but to your cottage?"

"O no!" I cried; "not back there!"

"What!" he said, grinning; "is Madam Judas yet short of her price?"

"What price have I taken? It is not to be Judas to betray brother to brother for virtue's sake."

He bent, in a sawing laugh.

"How apt the jade is! Let me tell you, madam, that virtue is an inner commodity, and spoils when too much on the lips."

He forced me to mount, signed to his fellows to follow, and, taking the bridle, led me down the hill.

"Now, for your price," said he, as he walked. "Well, I would have bid more for sound goods; but—what say ye?—you are happy on relations—would you like to be my daughter?"

I hung my head, without replying. It was true he was old enough to be my father. This misery must cast me once more on the world, a prey to all unimaginable evils. What chance else remained to me to protect myself and make my fortune serve my honour?

While I was still quietly weeping, we reached the cottage from the front, and halted. The earl motioned, and his suite gathered round and knocked on the door. In the silence that ensued we could hear the sound as of an unwieldy beast within shuffling to and fro. The verderer had seen us through the window, and knew himself for lost. Presently one put his knee to the panels, whispering for orders.

"Curse it, no," hissed his master; "he may hear us."

"If he does, he cannot escape," I murmured. "I pulled the ladder after me."

With that he raised his hand, and the door crashed in. I caught one glimpse of Portlock's face—it was a mere white slab of terror—and turned away.

"Now," said the earl in my ear; but I shuddered from him.

"I won't—don't ask me—it is not in the price!"

He uttered an impatient oath, bade one of his men hastily to my side, and himself, with the other three, strode into the cottage.

I don't know how long passed; it may have been minutes, and seemed an hour. All the time a low snuffling reached me from the interior. The bitter wind had loosened my hair, and I caught its strands to my ears, to my eyes, and rocked in my saddle, trying to shut out everything. Presently a man came forth, to join the other by my side.

"Garamighty, Job!" muttered he; "his honour be cap'en of the gang, and no mistake. You should see his larder."

"Ah! what's in it?" asked the first.

"Ten fat bucks, as I'm a saint," answered the other. "We know now where the pick o' the herd's gone to, eh?"

I sat up, listening.

"What larder?" I asked faintly; for, indeed, I knew of none.

The man touched his hat, half deferential, half impudent.

"'Tis through the secret passage your ladyship, so to speak, opened to us—a locked door in the little cellar beyant."

I shrunk from him.

"You said—what did you say was in it?"

"What but a show of venison, miss—piled to the roof, one might say. He must 'a made a ryle living out o' deer-stealing, by your leave."

He had—and that was the whole truth of the secret he had withheld from me! All the time I had been torturing my fears into madness, he had been abroad in the midnight woods, murdering, not men, but deer; in league with an ignoble crew for a paltry gain. This romance of a social ostracism revenging itself on a social hypocrisy: savage, melancholy, yielding to love only the troubled sweetness of its soul—what did it confess itself at last? O, glorious, to be first consul to a little republic of poachers! To vindicate one's independence by picking the pockets of the king! It was all explained now—the whisperings, the draggings, the creaking carts—in that butchers' shambles, the secret store of a gang of deer-stealers. He was no better than a cutpurse. In my bitter mortification, I could have wept tears of shame. "I am justified of my act," I cried to myself. "Better that he should think me a traitor now, than live to curse me for withholding my hand when there was time and opportunity to save him!"

Nevertheless, when they led him forth presently bound and quiet, I could not face his eyes, but cowered before the undisputed reproach and sorrow in them. He came up quite close to me.

"It was your own fault," I muttered in my hair. "Why would you never tell me?"

"I was wrong," he said, quite simply. "You must forgive me for what I have taken from you, Diana. If it is any comfort to you to know, the poor little unrealised bond between us reconciles me to this—and all that is to come."

I felt as if my heart broke then and there. I was conscious of the red earl watching us. The other turned to him, with a laugh like death's.

"Take your reversion, brother," said he. "As for me, I am for the madhouse, I suppose."

At a grinding word, two of the men helped him to mount, and moved away with him. I never saw him again. The other two entered the cottage, to

fetch and escort Mr. Portlock to his doom. I was left alone with his lordship.

My heart was broken. I left it scattered on the turf, with all the fragments of the past.

"Now, papa devil," I said, with a shriek of laughter, "what about your dutiful daughter?"

XXI

I AM METAMORPHOSED

I HAD loved, and lost, and buried my dream of yesterday. It lay fathoms deep in the green forest. From the moment of my resurrection I knew myself for a changeling—a fairy creature quite other than the soft, emotional child who had cried herself to sleep on last night's hearth. George was in his house of discipline; Portlock, with others, transported; my past was broken for me beyond repair. Facing me instead were the battlements and pinnacles of a new dominion, with what infinite potentialities behind its walls! Conscience makes no conquests. With my rebirth had come the lust to supply the deficiencies of the old. I laid my love in its grave with tears and kisses, and turned intrepid to the assault.

Memory, my friend, makes men good critics, but bad romancers. I was too indulgent of my kind to be the first: beauty invited me: I would forget. Remorse is, indeed, of all self-indulgences the most useless. It reconciles an offended Heaven to us no more than do tearful sighs win a wife her husband's condonation of an ill-cooked dinner. An inch-narrow of reformation is better than an ell-broad of apology. Let our sweetness of to-day, rather, be our experience of yesterday. The gods find no entertainment in regrets. They shower their benefits on the unminding; and in the gifts of the present we are justified of our past actions. It is only when we are rich that we can afford to put up tablets to our

memories; whence follows that we cannot more honour the dead than by taking our profit of the living. Well, once I had lived *for* others; now I would live *on* them—a word of distinction and a world of difference.

His lordship took me straight to London, and gave me a little suite of rooms in his fine house in Berkeley Square, where I was to remain during the next three years, until, in fact, I was come legally of age. He had decided, on reflection, that I was to be his niece. He was a very great man, and this gift was only one of many in his disposal. It was no business of mine how he accounted to the world for my title. *My* interest was only to justify it, with a view to my position in life when I was become marriageable. Wherefore I would consent to give him none of my duty until he had drawn up a settlement in my favour, to date from my majority. I had had enough of unprofitable bargains.

Perhaps he would never have consented to this—for, like all covetous pluralists, he was parsimonious—had not the death of the young viscount about this time moved him to seek comfort in an artificial relationship for the real one he had lost. In the hearts of the worst of us, I suppose, such vacancies yearn to be filled; and so the poor childless wretch took his opportunity, and adopted me. I hope I acquitted myself properly for the favour; but, in truth, I could never quite forgive him his treachery to his brother.

In the meantime, I developed rapidly, and had my little court, quite exclusive of *les convenances*. The ladies, of course, looked askance at me; but what did I care? I had only to curtsy to my glass to procure the reason. And they made their *modistes* their deputies in paying me the sincerest flattery. Instead, I experienced the high distinction of a whole *entourage* of carpet-knights—captains and

parsons and diplomatists unending—who came to ogle their own images in my blue eyes, and, losing their heads like Narcissus from giddiness, tumbled in by the score, until I was stocked as full under each brow as an abbot's pond. It was a rare sport to throw crumbs of comfort to these gaping creatures, and see them rise and jostle one another for the best pickings. I assure you, my friend, I was a queen in my sphere, and had as much need to practise diplomacy. It was that first attached me to politics—the knowledge of into what good coin for bribery and the traffic of State secrets those pretty orbs might be converted. So soon, sure, as amongst my parliamentary followers I distinguished my favourites, I began to sift my political opinions, and to work for the handsomest. I have traced my measures in both Houses, believe me, my little monsieur: I have pulled some strings, sitting in my boudoir, with results as far-reaching as St. Stephen's. Ah, well! they were days! But I will be true to myself in not bewailing them. Memory, in my philosophy, is a very lean old pauper, crumbling dried herbs into his broth. I never could abide mint sauce unless plucked from the green.

Chief among my favourites was a madcap young member, whose wit was never so impertinent as when, flitting here and there for an opportunity, it could prick the sides of some great parliamentary bull, and elicit a roar for its pains. He was that Mr. Roper who, indeed, went so far, on somebody's instigation, as to tease the great Mr. Pitt himself on certain measures introduced for the betterment of the Roman Catholics, and who, in consequence, redeemed himself a little, it was whispered, in the eyes of high personages with whom he had long been in disgrace. His father was Robert Lord Beltower, that deplorable old nobleman who was reported early in life to have staked his honour on some trifling issue, and lost; and who always described himself as living a posthumous

life, since he had been carried off by a petticoat in the fifteenth year of his age. Father and second son (the heir to the title, Lord Roper of Loftus, was eminently respectable and pious) were known as Bob Major and Bob Minor; and, indeed, apart or together, could ring the changes on some very pretty tunes. But the minor, who had been a scapegrace page at court and early dismissed, was *my enfant gâté*, as well for his wit and information as for a daring that recked nothing of the deuce itself. He owned to no party, and as to his principles, "Why," said he, "I throw up my hat to the best shot, and that isn't always to the heavenly marksman. I have known the devil score some points in charity."

He never truckled to me, which was perhaps one of the reasons of my favour; but was like a licensed brother—a relationship I had come to regard. Indeed, he most offended me by his outrageous independence of my partialities.

"Fley! Come, rogue, rogue!" sniggered his father to him once, on the occasion of some abominable impertinence; you go too far. What the devil means this disrespect to our goddess? You'll be pricked, egad, one of these days, like that fellow Atlas, or Actæon, or what the devil was his name, that was tore for his impudence."

The son bowed to the sire, quoting Slender's words to Shallow. "'I will marry her, sir, at your request; but if there be no great love in the beginning, yet Heaven may decrease it upon better acquaintance, when we are married and have more occasion to know one another: I hope, upon familiarity will grow more contempt; but if you say "Marry her," I will marry her, that I am freely dissolved, and dissolutely.'"

"Why, you villain," said his lordship, with a grin, "if you're the devil quoting Scripture, I'm done with you."

"Nay, sir," said the other, "you flatter yourself. I quote no better than my father."

"No better, you dog! And how?"

"Why, sir, wasn't it you taught me that the more one sees of a woman the less one respects her?"

"I?"

"'Twas *à propos* the Chudleigh, sir, you may remember, whom you met at Ranelagh—in '49, I think it was—undressed as Iphigenia. She came clothed in little but her virtue, and caught a bad cold a-consequence. You may have forgot the moral of your sermon, sir, but I, as a dutiful son, have stored it."

"Hang you, Bob! What moral?"

"Why, sir, that a woman dreads exposure in nothing but her weakness to stand the test of it. If she's a peculiar fineness anywhere, she'll take some means to let you know."

"Then, sir," cried I, with a flaming face, "I pride myself on nothing so much as my hand!"—and I brought it down stinging on his ear.

"But I don't want your hand," he cried, stamping about, while his father roared, "Didn't I tell you as much?"

Nevertheless, we were fast comrades, and together in some captivating peccancies, of which I only learned to rue the publicity when they led to my undoing.

Mr. Roper, as I have said, found a particular delight in galling—*on somebody's instigation*—the sides of the promoters of the new pro-Papish Bills. Well, I will ask you, what did I owe to that Church? Was it likely that my treatment at its hands had left any love between us, or that I should wish its disabilities removed, who had suffered so much from it muzzled? I had been educated, under its shadow, to a full understanding of its juggleries and impostures. Now was the time, the country being still in a ferment over its heir-apparent's alleged marriage with the Fitzherbert, to relate my experiences.

There was at that date published in London a little fashionable scapegrace of a paper called the *World*,

the property of a Major Topham, who made it the vehicle for such a *chronique scandaleuse* as the town had never yet known; and in this paper I began (by preconcert with my political ally) to disclose, over the signature "Angélique," the true story and circumstances of a certain beautiful young lady, who had been practised upon, and in the very heart of Protestant England, by a worse than Spanish Inquisition. The series, cautiously as I began by handling it, made an immediate sensation, and was, you may be sure, deftly engineered in the House by Mr. Roper for the Opposition. Moreover, "Angélique"—which delighted me as much—gave her sweet and melancholy name to a mourning gauze, which was so pretty that I had to kill an aunt to give me a title to wear it. At the same time her instant popularity made me tremble for my incognito, which, nevertheless, I knew to be the major's very best asset in a profitable bargain. Still, not even his tact could altogether explain away the association of ideas implied in Mr. Roper's common friendship with me and with that poor persecuted anonymity; and that I had made myself by no means so secure as Junius was a fact disagreeably impressed upon me on a certain evening.

I had been entertaining late that night, when his lordship entered unexpected. He came from St. James's and from playing backgammon with the king, and wore his orders on a pearl-silk coat and, for contrast, a mighty scowling face over. I took no heed of him as he walked up the room towards me, humping his shoulders, and acknowledging wintrily the salutations of my little court, but went on laughing and rallying a dear little ensign Percy, with whom I was in love just then, *pour faire passer le temps*. However, the boy could not stand the inquisition of the red eyes, and joked himself into other company, with a blush and a bow to the ogre; at which I laughed, lolling back in my chair.

"Well, madam," said Hardrough, knuckling his snuff-

box softly, "when you can vouchsafe me a moment of your attention."

I recognised the compelling tone in his voice, and rose, with a little show of indolence.

"O!" I said, yawning, "what sin has found me out now? I vow it can never be so ugly as it looks."

He gave me his arm, mighty ceremonious, and, conducting me into an antechamber, shut the door.

"That is for you to prove," he said, taking snuff, and stood glaring into my soul. "So, madam," he said, "you are for setting your little teeth into the hands that have warmed you?"

I sat down, fluttering my fan, and pretty pale, I daresay. But I was not surprised. My conscience had pricked me at the first sight of his face. He pulled from his pocket a copy of the damning sheet, and "Tell me," says he, "if His Majesty was justified in asking me if this did not refer to some member of my family?"

I did not answer, and he threw the paper on the floor.

"Well, you are condemned," he said drily; and at that I found my wits.

"Condemned?" I cried. "By whom? Why, my lord, how can you, being of the Court party and in Opposition, condemn an anti-papish tract?"

"That is all very well," he said acridly; "but the stone once set rolling against a house, who knows who may be included in the ruin?"

I knew very well, of course, to what he referred; for had he not been subsidised by his sister (and during the time, too, when he had figured hottest against Catholic emancipation) into overlooking the establishment by her, in the very heart of his estate, of that community of Sisters whose complicity in my abduction I was bent upon exposing? And was I not aware, too, that the appointment he coveted to a vacant garter trembled at the moment in the balance of such revelations? O, I held some strings, my friend, you may believe! though at present I had the opposite to any inducement to pull this particular one.

"Why, Nunky!" I cried, "is not this, your succour and protection of madam's poor victim, the best proof of your orthodoxy?"

He regarded me grimly, but with some shadow of returning good-humour.

"That's true enough," he said, "so long as you use *me*, if at all, for no worse than to point the moral of *her* damnation."

"Why should I not? 'Tis my interest to, at least."

"Ha!" he said; "there you speak. And stap me if I love you the less for it."

He took a turn or two, and came back grinning.

"They're damn clever, Di: there, I'll admit they're damn clever! But 'tis a perilous game you play, my girl; and you'll do well to take care you play it to none but your own interests."

He went off again, and returned.

"Harkee!" he said; "there's Beltower's whelp, and—and I don't care a fig for your predilections. Work your oracle as you will; only be faithful to me, and you won't suffer for't in the end."

He finished in such spirits that he was moved to show me a letter he had received from his sister but a few days before. In it she upbraided him for his treachery—of which she only recently had certain information—in converting his capture of me to such infamous account; and called upon him, as he valued his soul, to turn his Jezebel adrift again to her merited deserts.

"*Enfin*," I said, handing him back the effusion, "for a respectable lady she shows a vigorous vocabulary. She writes in London, I see."

He chuckled like a demon.

"She writes in hell, and bites the more viciously for her roasting. 'Tis that fellow has led her here, dancing after some new fancy of his; and, by God, she's paid for her stubbornness, and must vent her spite on someone."

“Well,” I said, “tell her so from me ; and that, for my part, I’d rather be Jezebel than what came to lap her blood.”

At which he neighed, vowing he’d take me at my word.

XXII

I RUN ACROSS AN OLD FRIEND

IT has always been my fate to suffer most at the hands of my best friends ; and now it was to be my dearest, my little sister, who was to shoot her arrow over the house and wound me. In innocence, Heaven forgive her ; and, in forgiving, answer to itself for making me the unconscious instrument of its retribution.

It was in the third year of my "minority," and while in the full zest of my conspiracy with young Roper, that one night we made up a party for Vauxhall Gardens, and crossed from Whitehall Stairs—very merry with French horns and lanterns and a little Roman boy, Ugolino, who sang like an angel—to witness the new picture of a tempest in the cascade house. This we had seen, and were gone for supper into one of the boxes (which Bob called the loose boxes) in a retired corner of the grove, when occurred the *contretemps* which was to change the whole face of my fortunes. I had observed, without marking them, a couple enter the adjoining booth, and was bawling my part in a catch, while waiting for the chickens and cheesecakes, when a fellow put his head round the partition, and, kissing his dirty hand with a leer, "Beg pardon, leddies," says he, "but I can supplement that 'ere chaunt with a better"—and immediately, disappearing from sight, began to bang the table beyond and to roar out a filthy ballad.

Roper leapt to his feet—there was a crowd lingering by, attracted by our merriment—and ran round to the front.

"Stop, you sot!" screamed he, "or I'll nail your ears to the table!"

The fellow ceased dead, and in a moment came staggering out with a furious face. He was a coarse, blotched ruffian, and as drunk as David's sow.

"What, the 'ell," said he, lurching up his words; "ain't one song as good as another in this here bordel, mister?"

Bob struck like Harlequin, and the wretch went down. I had once before heard the smack of flesh on flesh, and it made my blood jump.

There was a fine uproar: we had all risen to our feet; and in the midst I observed the girl (we had forgot the creature had a companion) slip out of the box and away, taking advantage of the confusion to mix with the crowd. I just saw her white face melt from me, and gave one gasp, and started in pursuit. My companions called; but I took no notice, and was lost in a moment.

She was making for the Druid's Walk, unheeding my cries in her blindness. But in a little she began to falter, and then to sway, and I came up with her, and caught her into my arms.

"Patty!" I whispered, frantic, "Patty!"

She looked at me quite dumb and bewildered, the poor thing; and then sighed, and mechanically put her hair back from her temples.

"Patty!" I urged again, "don't you know me?"

And at that, all of a sudden she had burst into tears, and was clinging to me.

"Is it you, Diana?" she sobbed, "really you at last? O, I have so longed, since we came, and I knew you was here in London! Take me away; don't let me be carried back."

She was near choking me with her arms.

"Hush!" I said. "What have they been doing with you? Pish, child! that was never—no, no; with all your softness, you couldn't be such a fool. Who the deuce was it, then? Now, don't answer; but come with me where we can talk."

We were already being accosted and offered genteel squiring. The child held to me, terrified, while I laughed, and convoyed her in safety to the open, where we were lucky to encounter one of my party.

"Is it over?" I asked.

"O, faith!" he answered, quizzing my friend, "the manster's floored; and Parseus refreshing himself on Roman panch; and here, by my soul, 's Andrameda come to give thanks to her presarver."

"Well," I said, "Andromeda's in better hands for the present; so you must e'en take us where we can talk private, while you mount guard."

He looked mightily astonished; but, obeying, conducted us to the farthest limits of the grounds—where was little company but the keepers, put to restrain interlopers from the fields beyond—and there set us on a seat, and withdrew. And the moment we were alone, I took the girl and held her at arm's length.

She was the same as ever, though her figure grown a thought too full for perfection, perhaps. But there were the soft, bashful eyes, and the naïve face, too white under its dark hair, that I loved so well.

"So," I said, nodding my head, "we meet again, like the town and country mice. And are you still under her dominion, you little brown frump?"

She could not have enough of wondering, and fondling me, and weeping; but her inarticulateness filled me with a horrible foreboding.

"What!" I cried, giving her a little shake; "don't tell me, miss, that—but, no, I won't hear it! 'Tis grotesque beyond reason."

"What do you mean?" she whispered.

I looked searchingly into her eyes.

"No," I said, reassured; "there are the same unborn babies there. But who, then, was that brute you ran from?"

She put her arms round my neck.

"He—he is a groom of madam's, and high in favour with her because a good Catholic. She bids me listen

to him ; and—and I don't know what she means, Diana, or what he means. He is a coarse and violent man—sometimes. But she forces me into his company, and to see the town together. And O, Diana ! I am almost sure he drinks too much."

I burst into a laugh.

"You should be whipped for the slander, child. But I suspect the truth. We don't run but from those we have a partiality for. Watch Moll and Meg at dragging-time in the fairs."

She cried "Diana !" and, looking up horrified into my face, read its mockery, and, gasping out, "I am very unhappy," fell away from me.

"You poor little creature !" I cried, fiercely moved by her distress ; "if *you* don't know what madam means, *I do*. 'Tis the way with the quality to pension off their discarded fancies on Jack or Molly."

She showed by her manner that she did not understand me, but my indignation would not let me explain. Moreover, I was too satisfied with my own solution to wish it contradicted.

"Never mind," I said, stamping my foot. "Tell me everything—every word."

Then it all came out in a flood : How, since my removal, madam had visited more and more upon her innocent head the trespasses of her poor little friend and sister ; how this habit, vindictive at the best, had grown into a very fury of spite (which I laughed much to hear about) when de Crespigny's wandering fancy had begun (as it inevitably had) to turn from the hop-pole, which had invited it to be wreathed about itself, to the ripe little sapling growing so snug beside ; how, in her jealousy, my lady had driven her below stairs, and at last made her altogether consort with the servants as her proper peers, who had only been lifted by her generosity out of the gutter ; how, not content with this, literal, debasement, she had thought further to soil her by forcing upon her the reversion of her tipsy *cavaliere servente* (as, anyhow, I chose to think him), a

tyranny which had at last driven the soft little creature to despair and rebellion. So she told me all, though with less force and conviction, poor simplicity, than I have chosen to put into her relation.

"And you was gone—and how did you escape, Diana?—and I hated Mr. de Crespigny as much as I hate this one—and it all makes no difference, and I don't know how I can bear it longer," she cried, in a breath.

"Very well, then," I said, and looked sternly at her. "You must find the courage to run away."

I had thought that the very suggestion would make her faint; but instead, to my surprise, a rose of colour flew to her pale cheeks.

"Yes," she whispered. "If I only knew where!"

O, fie on madam! She must have been a cruel task-mistress, indeed!

"There!" I said, "you naughty little thing! But confess to me first what you have heard tell about your sister."

"What does that matter," she murmured, hanging her head, "when nothing in the world can ever alter my love for you?"

I took her in my arms, and touched her little simple coquette into shape here and there.

"You are very desperate, in truth, child. What do you say—will you risk all, and come and be my deanna? You are older than I, sure, and shall defend our little sister from slander. I will get the earl to consent, if you will say yes."

She seemed beyond answering, but could only cling to me in a kind of frenzied rapture.

"And I will make a fine bird of my Jenny Wren," I said, still busy with her; "for she has a thousand pretty little modest graces which will do me a vast credit in the dressing. You shall keep your natural hair, miss, for powder, since the tax, is not *à la mode* with the best; but a gentleman's arm — *le cas échéant* — would never go round this waist by three inches."

I peeped, with a smile, into her face.

"O, if I only dared!" she sighed.

"Sir Benjamin," I cried, rising instantly, "escort us to the gates, please, and call a coach."

An hour later I broke upon his lordship's privacy.

"Nunky," I cried, "I want permission for a new toy, please."

He looked up askew. He was in the hands of his valet.

"I have been taking thought for my reputation," I said, "and desire a duenna."

He screwed out a laugh and an oath.

"I'll have no old hags about."

"'Tis a young hag but a little older than myself. Will you let me?"

"No, I won't."

"It will please me."

"No."

"It will spite Lady Sophia to death."

"Curse it, you viper! I'll think about it."

"Very well. I'll bring her to be introduced." And, before he could remonstrate, I was gone.

We found him in demi-toilette when I returned, dragging my reluctant baggage with me, like a lamb to the slaughter. She was as terrified as if 'twere for him I coveted her, and not for myself. He started, seeing her, and came and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Well, I vow," said he, "'tis a toy for a king. Whence come you, child? From my sister? She was wise to dismiss you, egad!"

XXIII

I AM MADE FORTUNE'S MISTRESS

I HAVE ruled myself all my life to be none but Fortune's mistress. Let who will question it, the gift of fine clothes has never bought-my independence. Honesty, as the little plant of that name tells us, may go dressed in satin. And, as with me, so would I have it with my sister.

I was not long in discovering that I had erred in bringing her to Berkeley Square, though I will not, for her sake, detail the processes of my enlightenment. Let it suffice to say that the nobleman, my guardian, was not exactly intellectual. He was one of those who, like Tony Lumpkin, reckon beauty by bulk; and in that respect, it is certain, Patty could more than fill my place with him. She had no notion, of course, dear innocent, that she was being invited to do so. She was all blindness and affection; but that made it none the less my duty to save her the consequences of her own simplicity, seeing how it was I had unwittingly brought it imperilled. The worldly may sneer and welcome. That I *did* preserve her, and at the last cost to myself, is the only proof needed of that same disinterested honesty which in the beginning had welcomed her, without a selfish second thought, to its arms.

Now, the moment I realised my mistake, I set myself to combat its results. I think I may say I gave my lord some *mauvais quarts d'heure*. He, for his part, when I thought it time to throw off the mask, did not spare me insult and brutality. In very disdain

I will not report the quarrel. And all the while the silly child its subject trembled apart, in an atmosphere she felt but could not understand, while the shepherdess and the butcher disputed for her possession.

At length came the climax. One day, at the end of a furious scene, he told me roundly that he had had enough of me, and that it would be well for me to agree to commute my proposed settlement for—for what? A sum that was less than a valet's pension. I refused it; I refused everything. Let that at least speak in my vindication. He assured me that in that case I had nothing further to expect from him. The dotard! Did he laugh when I told him, perfectly quietly, that I quite understood that the debt was mine, and that I should pay it? Did he still count himself the better tactician, when I affected to be terrified over my own rashness, and to slink away from him to lament and reconsider?

I went straight to my bedroom, where for an hour or two I sat writing. At the end, I despatched two letters, one to the *World*, one to Mr. Roper, who lived hard by, and whose reply I set myself to await with what philosophy I could muster. It came in a little; and then, singing, I sought out Patty, in the pretty boudoir that was hers of late. She flew to greet me, and coaxed me to a couch. The moment we were seated, I hushed her head into my breast.

"Patty," I whispered, "do you love the earl?"

I could feel her breath stop, then recover itself in wonder.

"He is so good to us, Diana—like a father. And I had always lived in such terror of his mere name. How easily we may be deceived."

"Yes, child," I answered. "How easily—how easily."

Her pulses answered to my tone, I could feel again. She slipped upon her knees before me, and clasping her hands looked up, dumbly questioning, into my face.

"You are so simple, *ma mignonette* ; I hardly know how to tell you," I began pitifully.

"Tell me! O, what, Diana? I am frightened."

"I wish you to be. Patty"—I took her two entreating hands into one of mine, and with the other made a significant gesture—"all this—these little costly gifts—has it never occurred to you, child, that they are bribes"—I stopped.

"To me?" she whispered, with a whole heart of astonishment.

"To your honour, child."

"To—?"

She gulped, and turned as pale as death.

"He has promised to show you his Richmond cottage?"

"Yes."

"To-night?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Never mind. I know. You must not go."

"How can I help it? Diana!"

She sunk down before me, quite helpless and unnerved.

"Patty," I said, "you have never ceased to love and trust your sister?"

"Never, never—you are before all the world to me. Diana! You will find a way!"

"If you are strong—yes. I have been alert and watchful, child, while you never knew it. But he did; and he means to separate us; to rid himself of the watch-dog, that he may seize the lamb. He has but this moment told me I must go—with what coarseness and insult I will not soil your ears by repeating. If you love your honour, as I love and have sacrificed myself to save it, you must come with me."

"I will come"—she rose hurriedly to her feet. "How can I ever repay you, sister? The old, wicked man! At once—Diana! let us fly at once!"

"Hush! We must be circumspect. You don't know— There, child, I will die to save you."

She clung to me, in a gush of silent tears. Hastily I instructed her—it was necessary in escaping to leave no trail—in my plan. It was that, in an hour's time, she should order out her barouche (there was one put at her disposal), and, having driven to Grosvenor Gate, alight and dismiss it, as if with the intention to walk in the park. Thence she was to make her way on foot to Mrs. Trix's toy-shop in Piccadilly, and, having asked very privately to be shown into the parlour, await me there, in whatever company she should find.

She obeyed, heedful, in her panic, to the last details. Luckily, my lord, being gone abroad to his lawyers, there were no prying eyes to criticise her. No sooner was she driven off than—having collected into a stocking all our jewels, and whatever money I could lay hands on, which I hung from my waist out of sight—I stole forth by the back way into the stables, and thence to the street, where I found a hackney coach, and drove after my friend.

I found her, as I had hoped, with Mr. Roper. He looked mighty serious over our escapade, but informed me that he had loyally attended to my instructions, and procured us a lodging, as for two country ladies who had come up to view the sights, in as distant a part of the town as he could compass on short notice. We went out immediately by a side door, and, having all got into a coach that was in waiting, were driven to Holborn, where we alighted, and thence, for precaution, walked to a quiet house in Great Coram Street, near the Foundlings, where our handsome escort left us, promising to call, at discretion, in a few days, and recommending us in the meanwhile to lie as close as rabbits in a furrow.

He was as good as his word, coming in a week later, after dark, with a face as long as a lawyer's writ.

"Well, madam," he said, "you have cut the ground from under your own feet with a vengeance."

I laughed.

"You have been reading '*Angélique's*' Last Testament?"

"Pray the Fates it may not be so indeed," he said gravely; and, pulling a paper out of his pocket, began to refer to it.

"Why, do you not know," said he, "that others besides our *Volpone* are reported interested in that strange disappearance of a one-time heir-presumptive to *Volpone's* own title?"

"Perfectly."

"And yet you go and put your head into the lion's mouth?"

"I would do more to expose a villain. I would go all lengths to right an injured man. He is no more mad than I am."

"That seems probable."

He unfolded a second paper from the other, and pointing silently to a paragraph, handed it to me.

"The king" (I read from the *Gazette*) "has bestowed the vacant garter upon the newly created Marquis of Synge;" and a little lower down: "it is stated that the Earl of Herring has been relieved, at his own request, of all offices which he held under the Crown. His lordship is understood to have long contemplated a complete retirement from public life."

I shrieked with laughter. I danced about the room, waving the paper over my head. The noise I made brought up one of two gentlemen who lived below. He put his head in at the door, with a leer and a grin: "O, a thousand pardons!" said he; "I thought you was alone, and that something had happened"—and he vanished.

"He thought something had happened!" groaned Bob dismally; and, taking the paper from me, he read out elsewhere: "His Majesty's final decision is supposed not unconnected with the *esclandres* of a certain notorious lady, which have exercised the public curiosity for some time past, and which culminated on Saturday sennight in an attack too obvious in its direction to be overlooked."

I heard, glistening.

"Well, I told him I recognised my debt, and should pay him," I said.

Bob folded the papers, and returned them to his pocket. His mouth and eyes were set in a kind of suffering smile.

"You may know best how to play your hand for yourself," he said. "God preserve your partner, that's all."

"What have you to fear?"

"Your prudence, first of all—not a very trustworthy asset, if one may judge by your apparent confidence in your fellow-lodgers."

"O! him that looked in!" I said. "I will answer there with my life."

He raised his eyebrows.

"Yes, that is the point," said he. "Do you quite realise what you have done, Diana?"

"O, quite!"

"Well, that is a comfort. It gives me a sort of confidence in my future. So long as I can be played as live-bait for your capture, I shall be spared, no doubt."

He came up to me, and spoke very earnestly—

"Do you understand? He will try to trace you through me. If he succeeds"—

"There is an end of both of us," I said cheerfully.

"Well," he answered, with admiration, "you are a game little partlet. But remember, at least, that revenge which evokes retribution misses the best half of itself. For that reason, if for no other, I must keep away from you. This visit to-night, even—I only dared it after infinite precautions. If you want me, write: I will risk some means to see you. For the rest, live close as death, till some of this, at least, is blown over. Your friend, the pretty simpleton, where is she?"

"In bed and asleep."

"Keep her there. Make a dormouse of her. My Lady Sophia is nosing for her tracks, as my lord her brother for yours. Did you suppose she would

acquiesce quietly in the abduction of her handmaid? I tell you, she has got wind of the truth; and there has been tempest in the house of Herring. Keep her close. Above everything, cut all further communication with the *World*—as you love yourself, and me a little, perhaps, Diana.”

“As I love the truth,” I said; and went up and kissed him.

“Ah!” he sighed, “that is very pretty. But, believe me, the truth, as represented by His Majesty, wishes your love at the devil before it meddled in his family affairs.”

XXIV

I FIND A FRIEND IN NEED

YOU know the truth, *mon ami*—that the face which looked in at my door was the face of my father. O, heavens, the reunion, so wonderful, so pathetic! and the sequel, so interesting! Truly, through our living fidelities do the gods chastise our worldliness.

We had not been a day in the house when I ran across him in a passage. He was, it appeared, one of two gentlemen who lodged below. He was plainly, almost shabbily dressed; bloated a little; prematurely aged: but I knew him instantly. Though eleven years had gone since my childish eyes had last acknowledged and adored him, the instinct of nature was too sure to be deceived. I gasped, I trembled, as he stood ogling me; finally I threw myself into his arms.

"Papa!" I cried; "papa!"

"Hey!" he responded; "is that all?"

"Do you not remember your little Diana?" I implored, in an ecstasy of emotion.

"Wait," he said, and put a hand to his forehead. "It may be on my notes. I've a damned bad memory."

The door of a room hard by stood open. He led me in, closed it, and seated himself officially at a table.

"Now," he said, "what mother?"

The shock, my friend! I had remembered him so strong and gallant—wicked, if you will; but then I had always pictured myself the cherished pledge of

his wickedness. And now, it appeared, I was only one of a large family. Without a word, I turned my back upon him.

"Don't go," he said, disturbed at that. "What name did you say?"

I confronted him once more, sorrow and disdain battling in my face.

"I said Diana."

"Of course," he answered, beating his forehead; "the child of"—

After all, it was a long lapse of time. I told him my mother's name.

"She was my one real love," he said, shedding tears. "I recall her among the peats of Killarney as if it were to-day. When she died (she is dead, isn't she?) I buried my heart in her grave. I have never known a moment's happiness since. Speak to me of her, Dinorah."

He followed me up a little later, when Patty was sitting with me, and peeped round the door.

"May I—daughter Di?" he said. I believe he had really in the interval been looking among his notes, or letters, and with such benefit to his memory that he felt secure, at least, in that monosyllabic compromise. Blame my fond heart, thou *fripon*. I was softened even in my desperate disillusionment by this half recognition. With a father, fashionable and well-connected, possibly rich, to safeguard my interests, I need no longer fear the light.

Receiving no answer, he sidled himself into the room, and to a sofa, on which he sat down. Patty, dropping her work, looked at him with all her might of astonishment.

"And is this dear child your sister?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered; "from the very first."

"Twins?" he exclaimed. "I am very sure there is no such entry."

He sat frowning at the carpet for a little. Then, "Wait," he said. "It is my misfortune to serve small

beer." And with these enigmatic words laid himself down and fell asleep.

With his first snore, Patty flew over to me.

"Who is it?" she whispered, frantic.

"*It is a wise father that knows his own child.*"

"*Father?*" she said.

"Hush!" I answered; "yes." And would say no more till he woke.

He came to himself presently, in a properer sense of the word. During the interval I had been curiously observing his condition. It was very different in seeming from that of the spark of eleven years since. It showed an assumption of finery, it is true; but the trappings were tawdry and soiled, and the materials cheap.

He sat up with a prodigious yawn, his face, in the midst, lapsing into a watery, paternal smile. But it was evident at once that something of the thread of memory was restored in him; and he began questioning me much more shrewdly and to the point.

"Why, ecod," said he presently, "was it a fact that the sweep had stole you? If I'd only learnt the truth before Charlie Buckster put a bullet in himself. I'd a double pony on it with the man."

Then we got on famously. He cried much over his poor lost love, and was so tender with me that he completely won me from my reserve, and I ended by recounting to him the whole tale of my fortunes, even up to the present moment.

"That Herring!" he said: "a fine guardian to my girl! I knew the stoat well in my time. Let him beware, now that she has found her natural protector."

He swelled with indignation, as I with pleasure.

"You have gifts, presents from him, no doubt," he said fiercely. "What do you say to my taking them all back, and throwing them in his face?"

"I say, certainly not," I answered.

"Ah well!" he said, "you have got them, anyhow; and the thought will wring his covetous soul."

At this moment a great voice roared, "Johnson, you devil!" down below somewhere.

My father got quickly to his feet.

"Ay," he answered, to my look; "'tis me, Di—the pseudonym I go by. Fact is, child, I'm temporarily under a financial cloud, and forced to eke out a living, while awaiting the moment of my complete restoration to fortune, by service—that is to say, by taking it, hem!"

"By taking service?"

"Exactly. A sort of elegant cicerone and social introducer to a damned old parvenu curmudgeon, who wants to learn at what lowest outlay to himself he can pose as a gentleman. 'Tis tiresome, though in its way amusing; but I really think I shall have to cut the old rascal on his taste in liquor. For a palate like mine, you know—small beer and blue ruin, faugh! You haven't change for a guinea, my angelic?"

"Johnson!" roared the voice again.

"Coming, sir, coming!" cried my papa; and, seeing me unresponsive, skipped out of the room.

He was with us continually during the fortnight after our arrival; and I had no least idea of the consequences awaiting me, when one afternoon a hastily scribbled note, dated "*en route* for the Continent," was delivered at the house door by a porter, and sent up to me. I read it, shrieked, and sank half fainting into a chair.

"I have taken, dear daughter," it said, "the entire responsibility for our monetary affairs upon my own shoulders. To live on one's capital is, like the self-eating pelican, to devour the substance of the unborn generations. Seeing how you appeared quite unaccountably callous to the natural claims of your prospective family (for, with your attractions, you cannot hope to escape one), I, as its prospective grandfather, have asserted my prerogative by appropriating our principal to its properest uses of investment. The stocking you will find still reposing in its secret *cache*

behind the hangings of your dressing-table ; but you will find it empty. Do not blame me, but console yourself with the conviction that in a few weeks I shall be in a position to return you your principal *at least trebled*. In the meanwhile, accept the assurances of my love and protection."

Half dazed with the shock, I tottered, with Patty's assistance, into our bedroom. It was too true. The desperate wretch, seizing his opportunity by night while we slept, had robbed us of everything. He had left us not a sixpence. We were ruined.

I tore my hair. I uttered cries and imprecations. I cursed Heaven, my own fond gullibility, the cruelty of the fate that would not let me live and be honest. Patty, poor fool, tried to calm me. I drove her away with blows, and, in a reaction to fury, rushed downstairs and into the room of the remaining lodger.

"Where is my money, where are my jewels?" I shrieked. "You are his accomplice. I will swear an information against you unless you tell."

He was a gross, coarse man, of a violent complexion.

"Ho-ho!" he bellowed ; "blackmail is it? Wait, while I call a witness."

He pulled the bell down, summoning our landlady. When she came, there was an outrageous scene. Quite cowed in the end, I retreated to our apartments, where, however, I was not to be left in peace. Within an hour the harridan appeared with her bill, an extravagant one, which of course I was unable to settle. The next morning, driven forth with contumely, we were arrested at her suit, and carried to a sponging-house. Thence, quite self-collected now in my desperation, I despatched a note to Mr. Roper, who, without delay, good creature, waited upon us. I told him the whole unreserved truth.

"Very well," he said, "I will quit you of this, child ; and, for the rest, find accommodation for you in humbler quarters till you can help yourself. With your genius,

that should not be long. You know my circumstances, and that I cannot afford luxuries."

"I will work my fingers to the bone," I said, with tears in my eyes.

"Not quite so bad as that," he answered. "Bones ain't negotiable assets. Have you ever thought on the stage, now, for a living?"

"I believe, without much study, I could make an actress," I said.

"With none at all," said he confidently. "I have a friend in Westley of Drury Lane, and will see if he can put you in the way to a part. I should fear the publicity, i' faith, but that my lord has taken his grievances to the Continent for an airing, and in the interval we are safe to act."

Good loyal friend! He found us pretty snug quarters over a little shop in Long Acre, where, keeping to our pseudonym of the Misses Rush, we bided while he negotiated terms for me. He was successful, when once I had been interviewed by the management; and, to cut short this melancholy story, I made my first appearance on the boards as the fairy Primrose in the Christmas masque of the *Dragon of Wantley*. I had a little song to sing about a butterfly, which never failed to bring down the house; and altogether, I was growing not unhappy in the novelty of the venture, when that, with almost my life, was ended at a blow.

But first I must relate of the most surprising *contretemps* that ever I was to experience, and which had the strangest and most immediate bearing on my destinies.

I had noticed frequently that the hind legs of the dragon would linger unaccountably, when the absurd monster, on his way off the stage, happened to pass me standing in the wings. This would lead to much muffled recrimination from the forequarters, which, exhausted by their antics, aimed only at getting to their beer; the consequence being that one eventful night, what between

the haulings and contortions, the back seam of the creature split, and out there rolled before my eyes—Gogo.

He picked himself up immediately, and stood regarding me silently, with a most doleful visage. My dear, I cannot describe what emotions swept my soul in a little storm of laughter—the astonishment, the pity, the bewilderment! In the midst, too confounded to arrange my thoughts, I turned away, affecting not to recognise him; seeing which, he uttered one enormous sigh, and stumped off to face the battery of the stage-manager's indignation.

I must have put a world of feeling that night into my little song about the poor butterfly, that was stripped of its wings by a cruel boy, and so prevented from keeping its assignation with the rose, insomuch that it moved a very beautiful lady, who was present in a private box, to send for me that she might thank me in person.

We had all of us, of course, heard of, and some of us remembered, perhaps, chucking under the chin, the ravishing Mrs. Hart, who, from pulling mugs of beer to the pinks of Drury Lane, had risen to be *chère amie* to his excellency the British Ambassador at Naples, and, quite recently, his lady. She had lately come to London, *à travers tous les obstacles*, to be made an honest woman of, and it was she who craved the introduction, to which you may be sure I responded with as much alacrity as curiosity. I could have no doubt of her the moment I entered the box, and made, with becoming naïveté, my little curtsy. She was certainly very handsome, in spite of her twenty-seven years and her large feet, though, I thought, lacking in grace. But her face was beautifully formed, with a complexion of apple-blossoms, and red lips a little swollen with kissing, and, to crown everything, a great glory of chestnut hair. There were tears in her fine eyes as she turned impulsively to address me—

“La, you little darling, you’ve made me cry with

your butterflies and things. Come here while I buss you."

There was a gentleman sitting by her, foremost of two or three that were in the box, and he made room for me with an indulgent smile. He was a genial, precise-looking person, with a star on his right breast, and the queue of his wig reaching down his back in long curls that were gathered into a ribbon. I took him, rightly, to be Sir William, the husband, and made him my demure bow as I passed. His lady gave me a great kiss, in full view of the house, and taking a little jewel from her bosom, pinned it into mine.

"There," she said, "wear this for Lady Hamilton, in token of the only reel feeling she has come across in your beastly city."

Sir William put his hand on her arm.

"My dear," he said.

She fanned herself boisterously. She had been disappointed, everyone knew, in her designs to be received at court, and was to leave England in a few days missing the coveted honour. Somehow she reminded me of the "bouncing chit" that our gentlemen call a champagne bottle—she so gushed and sparkled, and was a little large and loud.

I made my acknowledgments quite prettily, and left the box; and, once got outside, leaned for a moment against the wall, with a feeling of mortal sickness come over me. For, as I retreated, I had come face to face with those seated at the back—and *one of them was the Earl of Herring*.

Had he recognised me? He had not appeared to lift his eyes, even, as he sat at discussion with his neighbour. And that might be the most deadly sign of all.

I don't know how I got through the rest of my part. But that night I clung to Patty as if she were my only support in a failing world.

Morning brought some reassurance; and so, for a further evening or two, finding myself still unmolested,

I struggled to convince myself that he had not seen, or that I was forgotten, and my fault passed over. But all the time the terror lay at my heart.

On the third evening, as I was entering the theatre, I encountered a poor creature standing by the stage door. I went to him; I almost fell upon his breast in my agitation.

"Gogo!" I said, "Gogo!" and stood dumb and shame-stricken before him.

He threw up his hands with that odd familiar gesture, with that tempestuous sigh which found such an immediate response in my soul.

"Are you not coming in?" I faltered.

He shook his head.

"You are dismissed?"

"I spoiled their dragon for them."

I burst into tears.

"It was for me, dear. Do you see to what I have come? Forgive me, Gogo."

"I can't help myself," he groaned. "You are my destiny."

"Gogo, I am frightened; I am in danger. Help me, Gogo."

The poor fellow smiled.

"In everything but running away, Diana."

"And that is just where I want your help. Come to me: come and see me to-morrow, Gogo, will you? O, Gogo, will you?"

"Don't be foolish, Diana. At what time?"

"You know my address?"

"Of course I do."

"As early as early, then; the moment I am out of bed."

Strangely comforted, and looking to see if we were alone, I dropped a tiny kiss on his rough cheek, and ran in gaily, wiping my eyes as I went.

That night I sang my little song with renewed feeling, and ended to a burst of applause. As I was standing at the wings, flushed and radiant, a note was put into my

hand. I opened it, and read: "*You are in danger. Don't go home.*"

I never learned who had sent it; some one, probably, from amongst the few friends I could still number in that wicked household. It had been handed in at the stage door by a messenger, and that was all I could discover. The lights of my triumph were darkened. I knew myself at last hunted—and alone. Why had I not bid my monster wait for me? But it were idle now to moan. Despair gave me readiness. I finished my part quite brilliantly, without a stumble, and chatted gaily, while disrobing, with the poor pretty little *coryphée* who was my chief friend in the dressing-rooms. By one pretext or another I detained her until we were alone. Then, "Fanny," I said, "keep mum; but I think it unlikely I shall come here again."

She looked at me with her large grey eyes. We were much of a figure, and not unlike in features.

"O, Miss Rush!" she whispered. "And I'd 'oped always to 'ave you for a friend."

"So you shall, Fanny," I said: "but there are contingencies—you understand?"

Her lip was trembling. I think she wanted to tell me to keep good.

"And so," I said hastily, "as I have liked you so, I want to exchange little presents with you, as a remembrance, if you will."

The poor child had often cast admiring eyes on a calash which it was my habit to wear to the theatre, and which was indeed a very becoming thing of crimson velvet and cherry-coloured lining, with a frame of costly fur to the face. It had been given me by Bob, and certainly nothing short of my present desperation would have brought me to part with it; but it was, more than anything I wore of late, associated with me; and necessity has no conscience.

Fanny's eyes sparkled against her will, as I held the thing out to her.

"O no, miss!" she entreated; "it's too good for

me, and I can't give you nothing the same in exchange."

"You shall give me your neckerchief," I said; and, cutting the discussion short, drove her away at length, with her pretty face in the hood, and tears in her eyes.

I gave her five minutes' start, then followed her out, with a brain as hot as my heart was shivering. "They must discover their mistake very soon," I thought, "and will be returning on their tracks."

However, I reached home, running by byways, in safety; and there, quite unnerved now the terror was passed, threw myself into Patty's arms and told her everything. She was the sweet, simple counsel and consoler she always was to grief, and distressed me only by some concern she could not help showing for the fate of Fanny.

"You try to make me out a devil," I cried passionately. "They will let her alone, of course, when they find she isn't who they want."

We slept in one another's arms that night, fearful of every sound in the street. But morning brought the sun and Gogo—though the latter inexcusably late to his appointment—and both were a heavenly joy to me.

I saw at once by his expression that he carried news; but he did not speak.

"Gogo!" I whispered.

He uttered a strange sound, like a wounded beast, and turned his face from me.

"Did you exchange head-dresses with her last night?" he muttered.

"What do you mean?"

My heart seemed to stop.

"They said it was your hood. She was jostled by ruffians in the street, it seems, and thrown under the traffic, and killed."

I fell on my knees before him, shuddering and hiding my face.

"You didn't mean *that*, Diana?"

"Before God, no. I thought they would leave her when they found out."

He gave a heart-breaking sigh, and looked at me for the first time.

"I wouldn't go near the theatre again, if I was you. They'll not judge you as—as favourably as I, perhaps."

"I've done with the theatre. Fate is very cruel. No one understands me or believes in me. At least, don't tell Patty anything of this. I think you will break my heart among you. How did you even know I was threatened?"

"Didn't you tell me you were in danger?"

I cried out to him in a sudden agony—

"I *am* in danger. O, Gogo! for God's sake tell me what I am to do!"

Then the great human love of the creature went down before me. He fondled me, with tears and broken exclamations; he swore himself once more, through all eternity, through sin and sorrow, my bondman.

Presently, without extenuation, I had confessed all to him; and he had forgiven me; had admitted, even, that I had had the reason of a better regard on my side. But as to what had happened to himself during the long interval, he would tell me nothing as yet.

"I am the ex-hind legs of a dragon," he said, "that was conquered by the Chevalière Primrose, and turned into two-thirds of a prince. I date myself from the translation. The curtain's down on all that was before."

Now, when we came to discussing the ways and means for my escape from a desperate situation, my dear resourceful monster was ready with a suggestion at once.

"The Hamilton," said he, "sails from England in a day or two. She is disposed, by the tokens, to make a pet of you. Why not go to her; relate everything; throw yourself upon her charity, and ask to be conveyed abroad in her suite?"

"Gogo! When?" I cried. It was an inspiration.

"No moment like the present."

"I will go. But you must come too, to protect me."

"Of course."

"And Patty?"

"All three of us together. Pack your box, pay your bill, and be ready while I wait. At the worst, 'tis something gained to shift your quarters and cover your trail."

I demurred only at the bill; for, indeed, we needed every penny of our ready money. But he settled the matter by paying it himself.

"I have become of a saving disposition," he said; "and whatever trifle there be, you are its heir. This is only drawing on your reversion"—and, indeed, he valued money at nothing at all. If he could have picked a living from the earth, he would never have been to the trouble of putting a penny in his pocket.

In a little, all being prepared, we took a coach and drove to the Ambassador's hotel. My lady was fortunately at her toilette, and sent down a surprised message, that, whatever the deuce I wanted, I was to be shown up. I found her, tumbled a little abroad, in the hands of her *perruquier*, whom she dismissed while she talked to me.

"Why, child," she said, "what a face! 'Tis as white, I vow, as the wings of your butterfly. Out with your trouble now."

I threw myself at her feet. I made a clean breast of my story—of the inhuman cruelty of which I was the destined victim; and I ended by imploring her to let me and my friends enjoy the bounty of her protection. She fired magnificently, as I had hoped she would, over the recital. She embraced my cause impulsively and without a thought for possible consequences to herself.

"The infamous old fox!" she cried of my lord; "I was flattered by his attentions, hang him! until I found they was of the worst consequence to me as a lady of position. To think of the old beast wanting to murder

you because of a lampoon—pasquinades we call 'em in Italy! La, child! if I answered so to every dig that's made at me, I'd better turn public executioner at once. Let's keep our own characters clean against the light being turned on 'em, say I; and, if we don't, there's only ourselves to thank. It's too late to talk of bein' a lady when the crowner comes to sit on our dirty stockin's."

She made me repeat my little song to her, and cried over it again.

"Trot up your friends," she said, wiping her eyes. "There's room for you all here till we start for France—or Naples, if you will. Let me see the old devil dare to follow you into this sancshery! We'll be even with him, gnashin' his yellow teeth left behind. Go and fetch 'em. I want to see what they're like."

And she gave me a tempest of a kiss, and pushed me out at the door.

It is here we encounter that considerable lacuna in the Reminiscences to which reference was made in the "Introductory." An examination of the MS. shows that the large section—of more than a hundred pages—which related to Mrs. Please's experiences during the terrific period of the Revolution, and afterwards so far as the year '98, when the narrative is resumed, was at some time bodily removed, whether with a view to separate publication (of which, however, no proof can be found), or through one of those intermittent panics of conscience to which the lady was subject, there is no evidence to show. While this breach is to be regretted—from her editor's point of view, at least—it must be said that innumerable contemporary references to Madame "Se-Plaire" enable us in some measure not only to follow the career of that redoubtable adventuress (pace M. le Comte de C——), but to supply to ourselves at least one presumptive reason for her shyness, on reflection, of perpetuating certain of its incidents. However, not to confuse matters, we will take our stepping-stones in the order of their placing.

It appears, then, that Mrs. Please and her friends were

conveyed safely in the Ambassador's entourage, to Paris, where Madame the Ambassador's wife received, during the few days of her stay in the French capital on her way to Italy, some salve to her hurt vanity in the reception accorded her at the Tuileries by the queen, who took the opportunity to intrust her with a letter to her sister of Naples. Whether elated, indirectly, by the royal condescension, or electrified by the state of the national atmosphere, or for whatever reason, Diana, it appears, decided to remain where she was. She even, there is some reason for believing, sought, in the character of a very loyal little moucharde, to ingratiate herself with the queen, going so far as to imply that Lady Hamilton had taken this delicate means of placing in Her Majesty's hands a counter-buff to Mr. Pitt, whom Miss Diana had often seen in my lord of Herring's house in Berkeley Square, and whose sinister designs against France she was quite ready to quote—or invent.

However this may be, it seems certain that Her Majesty was inexplicably so far from being prepossessed by her fair visitor's fair protégée, that (assuming even that she gave her her countenance at the first) she did not hesitate long in turning upon her the coldest of cold shoulders. We know at least that within a month of her arrival in Paris, Diana (which always equals, be it understood, Diana plus her two inseparables) had established herself, far from the precincts of the court, in very good rooms in a house in the Rue St. Jacques; where with characteristic suddenness and thoroughness she announced her complete conversion to the principles of ultra-republicanism. It must have been about this time, moreover, that she found interest to return to the stage; for in addition to the inclusion of her name in the bill of that stirring melodrama, Les Victimes Cloîtrées, which set all fermenting Paris overflowing, there exists that reference to her in the rather spiteful Reminiscences of Adrienne Lavasse, which, I think, is worth transcribing. "Mademoiselle Please," says the actress, "was for a little our ingénue at the Français. She was imported from England; but, it must be confessed,

had a pretty gift [une belle facilité] for our tongue. One night, after a mêlée in the green-room, she lifts her voice in a furious outcry about her having been ravished of a neckerchief which had been given her by a fellow-comédienne in London, and which, she declares, she would not have parted with for a louis-d'or. But I never observed" (adds the little spitfire) "that she took the trouble to replace it with another; from which it is evident that it was not her modesty that she valued at so high a figure."

How long Mrs. Please continued on the stage at this time (she returned to it again later) is not certain. Probably her engagement was terminated by that famous split in the company, when democratic Talma and Vestris migrated to the Rue de Richelieu, bequeathing the remnant honours of the old house in the Faubourg St. Germain to the royalist Fleury, Dazincourt, and Company. What we do know is that about this critical period a lucky coup in a State lottery established our heroine on her feet, and that thenceforth she flourished. She kept a little salon in those same historic rooms, through which a regular progression of nationalists passed and vanished. There, in their time, were to be seen Brissot, Guadet, Gensonné, the Roman Roland, the handsome Barbaroux, Pétion, Vergniaud, the sweet and indolent, in his ragged coat, Desmoulins, Barrère, Billaud-Varennés, Barras. The order is significant of our lady's political, or politic, evolution. The life of the State, she came to think, was only to be saved by ruthless amputation; and, unfortunately, the disease was in the head. As the atmosphere thickens, our glimpses of her become rarer and more lurid. She appears once as the proprietress of a sort of Mont de piété, very private and exclusive, in which she amassed good quantity of property, pledged by the proscribed, who never returned to redeem it. Among these, curiously, seems to have been her father, whom, as characteristically as possible, she forgave and attempted to shelter, though without avail, for he was guillotined. It was probably to propitiate the Government for this filial dereliction that she reappeared on the boards, in '93, in that grotesque

monument to the dulness of the Sovereign People, The Last Judgment of Kings; and there, so far as we can trace, ended her connection with the stage.

During all this period, it is only fair to her to say, she seems to have played the inflexible duenna to her little friend and adoratrice, Miss Patty Grant, protecting the child from outside evil and her own kind pliability, and, when she was called away from her side, committing her to the care of that faithful and incorruptible monster, the cripple.

Towards the end of '93 she appears to have been so far in favour with the powers that she was despatched on a secret propagandist mission to the Neapolitan States—a portentous departure. She was not back in Paris again until the spring of '95, when she returned to find the Terror overthrown, its "tail" in process of being docked by Sanson, and the jeunesse dorée patrolling the streets.

Not much record of this journey remains, beyond the single weighty fact that it brought her acquainted with the young revolutionary enthusiast, Nicola Pissani, who accompanied her home by way of Tuscany and Piedmont, propagating their gospel of Liberty on the road.

We may perhaps be pardoned for thinking it probable that Mrs. Please, on her return to Paris, would have recanted her extremist views, had it not been for this romantic exalté, to whom, no doubt, she at the time was sincerely attached. It is possible, indeed, that she did persuade him of the necessity of an open recantation, in order that she might consort with him the more safely in those measures which he, and for his sake she, had at heart—the violent establishment of a republic at Naples, to wit. For, for the moment, sansculottism was out of fashion, and propagandists at a discount. It made no difference to her, apparently, that her former patroness and saviour was heart and soul with the court of Ferdinand. She was of the Roman mettle, and would have sacrificed her own child to Liberty—with Pissani. I swear my heart bleeds for her; for (the truth has to be uttered) that passionate young zealot was no sooner made free of the

house in the Rue St. Jacques, than he fell hopelessly entangled in the unconscious meshes of poor blameless, lovable little Patty Grant. And, worse: Miss Grant, without a thought of disloyalty to her friend and sister—who, indeed, persistently, and perhaps justifiably, posed for no more than 'the Neapolitan's pious fellow-missionary—yielded her whole sweet soul to him!

Nothing was declared, or came of this at the time. Pissani went back to Naples; the two—he and Diana: not he and another, you may be sure, unless by stealth—corresponded regularly; the march of events proceeded; our heroine managed, no doubt, to console herself, provisionally, for the separation. Perhaps she may have been conscious of an alteration in her friend; a hint of some sad preoccupation; the bright eyes dulling, the white face growing ever a little more white and drawn. If she did, she chose, while biding her time of enlightenment, to attach any but the right reason to the change. She seems to confess, indeed, that she had the suspicion. Like enough, in that case, she indulged it for a perpetual stimulant to her romance, which might have withered without. She was not one to bear tamely her supplanting by another—least of all by the little humble slave of her passions and caprices, of her kisses and disdains. And, in the meantime, the years went over them, while she was studying to ingratiate herself with the Directory, so that presently her house knew again its succession of ministers and deputies—men who came to lighten their leisure with a little interlude of love or wit. And so we reach the crisis.

Naples, about the middle of '98, was in a last state of ferment. Jacobinism threatened it within and without, the former but awaiting the advance of the French under Championnet to arise and hand over the city to its sympathisers. In September Nelson came sweeping to its sea-gates in his Vanguard; in October General Mack posted from Vienna to take command of its rabble army of resistance; in November its king led another army to Rome, nominally to restore the Pope his kingdom, and, having done some ineffective mischief, returned ingloriously,

to find his capital in a state of anarchy. Finally, in December, the whole royal family sneaked on board the Vanguard, and transferred itself pro tempore to Palermo, where it remained until the danger was laid, when it returned to exact a bloody vengeance.

Therewithin lies the whole tragedy of Pissani and a little English maid. Early in the February of that year the man had written, hurried and agitated, to Mrs. Please, to announce that the moment was ripe, the tree of despotism tottering to its fall, to be replaced by the more fruitful one of Liberty; and to urge her to come at once, if she would see consummated the glorious work for which they had both laboured so long and so self-sacrificially. No doubt that he believed in her single-heartedness, as she, in another way, in his. He assured her that she might be, if she would, a second Pucelle. He fired her vanity: he rekindled her passion. With characteristic impetuosity, she broke up her household, and (here figures either her blindness or her imperious self-confidence) prepared to transport it, stock and block, to the scene of her anticipated triumphs. She had no difficulty in procuring passport. Indeed, there is reason to suppose that she was intrusted with despatches for General Berthier, then occupying Rome. At anyrate she, in company with Mademoiselle Grant and her inseparable Gogo, embarked at Marseilles for Civita Vecchia; were in the Eternal City before the end of the month; and had thence, travelling again by sea, reached Naples without accident by the middle of March. Here, by preconcerted arrangement (as regarded only herself and the Neapolitan, however) they were met by Pissani, who conducted them in the first instance to a little cabaret in the dark quarters near the Arsenal. And here, from the glooms of that dingy rendezvous, Mrs. Please is pleased to enter again upon her own story.

B. C.

[*Note.*—To the curious in matters of personal appearance, the following extract from the *Reper-*

Correspondence (Hicks & Beach, London, 1832) may be of interest. The passage occurs in a letter—dated Paris, January 1798—from the Hon. Robert Roper to his cousin Lord Carillon, and runs as follows:—

“I have renewed my acquaintance with the Please, who is twenty-seven, and nothing if not the ripe fruit of her promise. Dost remember, Dick, how she was your ‘Long-legged Hebe’? I tell you, sir, she is by Jove out of Leda, a very Helen. She moults her years, like the swan her father its feathers, and is always ready with a virgin bosom of down for the next quilt. The same sprightly insolence; the same *perfect irregularity* of feature—and conduct; the same zeal in making the interests of others her own—and the profits thereof. Her face retains its pretty *moue*; her hair has only ripened a little, like corn. She is still slender, as we remember her—in everything now but the essentials; still as pale, with the flawless eyebrows and bob-cherry lips. I would be sentimental; but, alack! she tells me our past is put away in a little bag like lavender. ‘Would you wish the gift of it, sir,’ she says, ‘to lay among your bed-linen? ’Tis grown too scentless for my use. *Il n’y a si bonne compagnie qu’on ne quitte.*’ O, Dick, to be rebuked for one’s years, and by an immortal! O, Dick, for the time ‘when wheat is green and hawthorn buds appear’! Why may not our feet continue to dance with our hearts? I have a *débutante* always within my breast, and because *I* am forty, *she* must be a wallflower forsooth!

“She has realised at last *la grande passion*, she tells me. She is perfectly frank. *He* is gone elsewhere, and she only waits for his whistle to follow. *This* to me! She has her little salon, as pretty as a bonbon box, and a dozen of powdered ministers at her feet. The morning after our meeting I breakfasted with her and her friend. You recall the little soft brunette, with the motherly eye and the caressing bashfulness? She is still with her, the foil, as of old, to her ladyship, and virgin soil

to this day, I believe. . . . Madam took her tea laced with a little *eau de vie*. There was a curious legless monster in waiting: something between a dumb-waiter and a Covent Garden porter. She defers to him in everything; and he growls.”]

XXV

I DECLARE FOR THE KING

WE were landed upon the Mole, not far from the Castel Nuovo, a vast, sullen pile like the Bastille, on whose ruins I had danced. It was a dark and rainy night. Pissani, who had been squatted amongst some boats down by the water, rose, came forward in two or three swift strides, and exclaimed, in an eager, agitated undertone, "Mother of God! You are accompanied?"

I could not see his face, but my heart responded unerringly to the dear remembered tones. I went quickly to him, and put up my hands to his breast.

"Nicola *mio*—my brother, my comrade!" I whispered, "by all that, next to you, I hold most dear."

"What? Whom?" he asked, in a low voice of amazement. "Not—?"

"Yes," I said, "by my servant and my sister. You called and I came, Nicola, 'bringing my sheaves with me.'"

He was breathing fast, but he did not answer.

"Are you not pleased," I said, "that I give up everything for you and to you; that I devote my best to the cause—our cause, Nicola; that at the bidding of my brother I have moved my tent into the wilderness? Are you not pleased with me?"

"There is danger in the wilderness," he muttered. "No, I am not pleased."

I fell back with a little shiver. "No more for her than for me," I answered.

"It is not the same," he said; "it is not the same thing at all." In an instant he had gripped my wrist.

"Send her back into safety. She shall not risk her life here—by God, she shall not!"

And then I think I understood. I was calm as death, and as cold. It had needed but these few words to turn me into stone. My God! all my fervour and self-sacrifice—and this for their reward! I laughed out quite gaily—

"O, *mon chéri*! in the rain and the dark? Are you mad? Please to convey us to some shelter."

He hesitated a moment; then beckoned to Patty, who came running like a dog to the whistle. Pissani turned his back as she approached.

"Tell your servant to await your orders here," he muttered; "and, for you, follow me."

Patty stole by my side, dumb over her reception. The fool! the little adorable traitress! How would she have chattered, teeth and heart, had she seen my nails, hid under my cloak, dug into the soft palms they were clinched on. Yet I had an admiration for her, even while I crouched to spring. That she, self-obliterating, undemonstrative with men, could all the time have been softly insinuating herself between me and my love! I had not credited her with so much cleverness.

Our sombre patriot led us to a little *osteria* in a sewer hard by, where the rain beat on a lurid scrap of window, and a mutter of voices from within seemed to mingle in a throaty discussion with a gurgling water-pipe at our feet. There were two or three wine-drinkers revealed as he pushed open the door—strangely respectable folk in these incongruous surroundings. They but glanced up as we entered and passed on by a stone passage to a little remote room, where were a bare table and a single taper glimmering sickly on the wall.

Pissani shut the door and faced us. He was very pale and grim; grown sterner than my memory of him, but still the melancholy, romantic brigand of my heart. For a moment he seemed unable to speak; and in that moment I could see my little sister's hand shake on the table on which she had leaned it

for support. The truth was confessed amongst us all in that silence. And I—I knew it suddenly, instantly, for what I had long suspected but struggled to conceal from myself; knew it for the real solution of this my conscious unconscious caprice in bringing Patty with me. It had been to force it, to satisfy myself of the best or the worst, that I had acted as I had done. That I recognised now. And, after all, I was the first to speak.

"Well, M. Pissani," I said, "it seems that one of us at least is *de trop*."

His mouth twitched with nervousness.

"She cannot help the cause," he said. "She will only be in the way. What is her use in this pass?"

"Patty," I said, turning on the child, "M. Pissani does not want you. You can go back."

She looked at me, the helpless fool. Her lip trembled, and her eyes filled with tears. But Pissani by her side was smiling.

"I do not want you, child, I?" he said, in a sick voice, and held out his hands fondly to her across the table. "Ah, but we know better the truth of our hearts! When the battle is won, then, O gentle my love, that betakest thyself to love as the lark to heaven, come to me, as you promised! But not now—not now, when the storm is in the air, and this so dear shrine of my hopes might be struck and violated. You have not changed, you could not change: it is enough, I have seen you. Come now with me, Pattia, and I will take you back to the boat, to my friends, that they may see you secured in Rome until I can send to you and say, 'It is time, most dear wife, it is time. Return to me, and give thyself to be the mother of patriots!'"

She moved, and gave a little sob. Her response was not to him but to me—to the stunned questioning of my eyes. She had no wit but to utter her whole self-condemnation in it.

"Diana! I did not know! I have not been untrue to you."

I struck her on the mouth, and she staggered back, with that red lie printed on it for the delectation of her paramour. She clutched at the table, reeled, and sank down beside it moaning. It was too much. My fury had flashed to an explosion in that wicked falsehood.

Pissani, with a sudden and terrible cry at the sight of his mistress's disgrace, drew a knife from his hip, and leapt like a goat across the table. Stumbling as he alighted, she caught him frantic round the knees, and held him raging and snarling while he stabbed at the air in his frenzy. I stood fallen back a little, white and scornful, but with not a thrill of fear at my heart; and, so standing, saw how, in the thick blindness of his rage, he was yet tender of her in his struggles to free himself. And then in a moment he had fallen upon his knees, the blade yet in his hand, and was kissing and caressing her, moaning inarticulate love into her ear. She tried feebly to repulse him; to drag herself away and towards me. I had always known that she was of the fools who caress the hands that scourge them. But I sprang back, loathing her neighbourhood.

"Don't come near me," I cried.

He had kissed the blood from her mouth to his own. He struck the spot there with a furious hand, as he turned on me.

"By this," he said, "your death or mine!"

I laughed scornfully.

"So brutes revenge themselves on the innocence they have despoiled!"

"It is a lie!" he raged; and, on the word, put a fierce arm about his *wife*. "Believe it is a lie, thou!"

But she was still struggling to reach me.

"Diana! Not this end to all our love! Not this end to the high hopes with which we came. It is not ourselves, but Liberty, sister. See, he will be good; he will not hurt you" (she was groping eagerly for the knife, which he ended by letting her secure). "I did not know," she cried, "I did not guess—until this

moment I did not. I will never see him again, if you wish. I will be no man's wife to your hurt. Diana! It is the truth!"

I let her rave. I never took my eyes from his devil's face.

"So," I said, deeper now, and with my hands upon my storming bosom, "you would make your sacrifice to Reason, monsieur, in me—me! *My* mission was to be the Pucelle's, and her glorious fate, with which, I suppose, you were to assure your little after-paradise of loves. O, a grateful use for this poor heart, to be a stepping-stone to the respectable amours of Monsieur and Madame Pissani! Only I renounce the honour, as I renounce the cause of the paragon of taste who could prefer that for this."

I tore at my dress.

"You have made your choice," I cried; "it is all said. Only think, monsieur, think sometimes of what you have lost, before you talk of the battle being won!"

I hurried from the room, even as my false friend called to me again in agony, "Diana! Believe me! Listen to me! O, what shall I do?" "But, even in my frenzy, I had the wit to pause the other side of the door, listening for his response.

"Thou shalt go back to Rome, my dearest, my heart," he said. "Hearken to me, my Pattia."

But she only sobbed dreadfully, "Not like this—not in this disgrace. I must follow her, even if she kills me."

"By my soul, no," he said; "for your life is mine."

I could hear them wrestling together; till, in a moment, he prevailed, even before I had guessed he would.

"Hush, my bird," he panted softly; "there is one other way—if it must be so indeed."

There followed a pause. I could have laughed in the mad joy of my revenge. He was an upstart, this patriot; a son of the people. He would commit her to his own—wive her, I most fervently prayed—and deposit his jewel, this little pet of luxury, in the squalid

cabin at Camaldoli where he was born. He had often told me of it; of his early experiences of the joys of life in a place where the peasant could not fasten his coat against cold, or take refuge from the sun under a tree, or borrow a stone from the hill for his paths, or renew his starved patch with manure of leaves, or set a water-butt to catch the showers, or be buried decently when he dropped at the plough-tail and died, because buttons, and the shade of trees, and stones, and dead leaves, and rain-water, and a dead peasant were all taxed alike—items in a hundred other feudal impositions which left existence hardly its own shadow to prevail by. And now these joys would be hers; for I knew that she had not the strength to oppose him, though enough to damn her own fool fortune by insisting on the Church's sanction to her possession of an estate of mud and wattles. I listened cagerly for the next.

“If thou wilt be my mother's daughter?” he said.

I could have clapped my hands. I hurried down the passage and out into the night, fierce, burning, but with an exultation in my rage. The sight of men risen, scared and listening, as I passed through the wineshop, served to recall me to myself and to my danger. I was outcast from these conspirators—if only they had known!

With an effort I composed myself, and turned to them with a smile—

“Messieurs, but the door is between me and the street!”

One of them at that stepped forward, opened it, and gravely bowed me forth. As gravely I stepped into the rain, and made without hurry for the beach.

So this was the end to all my exaltation, to my dreams of love and sacrifice! I stamped in the puddles. “*Vive la tyrannie! vive les Bourbons!*” I cried to myself as I sped on. So shamed, so wronged, so spurned! was not the worst justified to me? I saw the shadow of my loved monster standing solemn sentinel over the single

trunk we had brought with us. Our heavy baggage we had left in Rome. O, *mon fidèle*! how at that moment I could have stormed my wounded heart out on thy breast!

"Canst thou lift it and follow me?" I said only.

He answered, the dear Caliban, by obeying.

"Whither?" he growled.

I looked desperately about me. Near at hand it was all a tangle of spars and sheds, and the rain driving between. But inland, the night went up in glistening terraces, scattered constellations all shaken in the thunder of a great city. Far south, what looked like the red light of a forge alternately glared, and faded, and grew again, battling, it seemed, with drowning flaws of tempest. It was the glimmering bonfires of Vesuvius, those hot ashes of a consumed empire, from which, according to Pissani, the phoenix Liberty was to arise. I laughed: "Not yet, my poet, my friend; since thou chooseth another than Pucelle to breed thee thy patriots!"

I turned to the north. There, upon a huddle of tall buildings, looming near and enormous in the dark, the stars of the hills seemed to have drifted down, clinging thickly over all, like primroses under a bank.

"It is the royal palace," said Gogo.

"It is *our* way, then," I panted, on fire. "Follow me, and quickly; we are not safe here."

Along wharfs and causeways, plashing over the filthy stones, by squalid alley and reeking wall, I fled and he pursued. I had no lodestar save my hate; but it served. The growing scream and thunder of the town drove towards us as we advanced; but few people in that bitter night; until, skirting the massed buildings of the arsenal and palace, we emerged suddenly through a little lane into the Strada di St. Lucia, and paused a moment undecided and amazed.

It was as if the devil had taken his glowing pencil and ruled off this quarter of the city for his own. A noisome ravine of houses it was, with life like a fiery torrent brawling along its bed. Song and tumult and

mad licence; fingers quick to stab, or to snap like castanets to a dancing child; doorways that were the mouths of tributary sewers vomiting filth and tatters into the main; fishermen, at their flaring stalls, bawling crabs and oysters, *frutti di mare*—my God! what fruit, and from what a sea that drained a shambles; women out in the rain and the open, making their shameless toilettes, and screaming the while such damnation by the calendar on their sister doxies for a word, a retort, a mere flea-bite (the commonest experience, after all) as to leave themselves, one would have thought, no vocabulary for the more strenuous encounters of fists and claws; children swarming everywhere in the double sense, and scattering shrill oaths like vermin; rags and nakedness and insolence—a loafing melodrama—an epitome of the worst squalor and viciousness in all Naples—such was the district upon which we had alighted, the mid-ward of the Lazzaroni.

As we stood, a ruffian, swaggering past, swerved, and approached a handsome, impudent face. Gogo, without a word, heaved his shoulder between. But I had no fear. These Lazzari were the king's friends—and mine. I pushed aside my henchman.

"*Pour le roi!*" I cried, and pointed towards the palace.

He understood, and whipped off his greasy hat.

"*Viva il re!*" he answered enthusiastically, showing his white teeth, and motioned us to a street going eastwards up the hill. I saw and recognised the same fellow once or twice afterwards. He was a Michele di Laudo—Mad Michael, they called him—who, as chief of his vagabonds, was to take a prominent part in the defence of the suburbs against the French.

We crossed the street under his protection, and on its farther side, before waving us on, he bent and snatched a kiss. The rank sweet touch of his lips was like a *visé* on my passport into hell. It seemed to bring the blaze, the colour, the stench of the reeling streets clashing to a focus in my brain, and it sent me speeding on half

drunk and half sick, loathing and hugging myself. I was an angel in Sodom, running blindly for the refuge of God's wing in a dazzle of roaring lights, and confused by the glare, knowing not whether I turned to the self I had left or to the self that was awaiting me. Gogo, straining in my wake, panted as I hurried before him—

"For every dog but the watch-dog, a bone."

I turned on him, with a stamp.

"A bone! I am meat for your masters, I tell you."

"I serve no Pissani," he said sullenly.

I shook him in my anger.

"Never breathe his name to me again, or we part."

"Very well," he said. "I thought as much. He has got his deserts."

"*Has* he?"

I glared at him one moment, then turned and sped on—up the street of the Giant, passing the north flank of the palace, where sentries stood on guard, and so into an open piazza, the Largho S. Ferdinando, into which the palace itself stuck a shoulder, and where were churches and the flaring portico of a theatre, and other buildings strangely fine in their contiguity to the slums we had left.

And here, amidst the wild drift and gabble of a throng less foul but as aimless, we plunged and were absorbed, and stood together again to breathe.

All Naples, it seemed, was bent on shouting down its brother.

"What next?" bawled Gogo in my ear.

A handsome inn, the "Orient," stood comparatively quiet and isolated in an odd corner of the *Place*.

"Rooms—there!" I answered.

"Its exclusiveness makes it prominent," boomed Gogo, with as much dryness as he could put into a roar.

I beckoned him on imperiously.

On n'a jamais bon marché de mauvaise marchandise.

In a little we were installed in comfortable rooms

"Now order wine," I said, "and we will drink."

I sipped, while he sat on a stool at my feet, soothing the weariness from them with a touch that was only my monster's. The Chianti and the sorcery of his hand began to drug me.

"Drink you too," I murmured.

He reached for his glass.

"To whom?" he said. "What are we now? It makes no difference; only I must know."

"Death to all republics," I cried, "and long life to the King of Naples!"

"Ah!" he said, between a groan and a sigh. "Well—the poor child—you have cast her off, I suppose," and he drained his glass.

I stared at him a moment, then fell sobbing upon his shoulder.

"You pity everyone but me," I cried, "and my heart is broken."

"What, in the old place?" said he.

But I was too miserable to retort; and half the night afterwards he held me, fallen fast asleep, in his arms.

XXVI

I RENEW AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

FOR three days I remained shut into my rooms at the "Orient," not daring to go out, a prey to the utmost nervousness and agitation. Do not suppose that on that account I was the less determined in my plans for vengeance. But revenge that lays itself open to retribution misses the better half of itself. I remembered my old friend Mr. Roper's dictum, and beat my brains only for the means to strike with impunity. I was not from the first without a design. The difficulty was to give it practical effect; because for the moment I could not use Gogo. For myself, under my assumed name, I might lie secure in this hiding. To make *him* my carrier to the English Embassy would be to mark a sure track to my retreat with every punch of his wooden legs. I dared not let him out; I dared not even temporarily part with him in my peril; I dared not come to a decision, while knowing that my life depended on a wise one. For I was a renegade revolutionary—I could not blink the fact. Though I had never hitherto actually set foot in Naples itself, there must be many to know me by report for that apostle of the new creed of equality who, but a few years before, had stumped their country, winning converts. And now! the safety of many men—and women too—was in my hands; and not Pissani, nor those others when they came to learn, would have forgotten the nature of my secession, or the significance of the threats which had accompanied it. If passion had given me away, caution must redeem me. I had no faith in Patty's power to protect me.

The occasion was too desperate; the interests involved were too many. Pissani was a reformer before he was a lover. I *must* be sacrificed, if possible, to the cause I had the means to betray.

All day, peeping from behind the curtains of our windows, we saw the piazza below like a seething cauldron of unrest. As significant of that as anything were the out-at-elbows letter-writers under the arcades of the old theatre of San Carlo, who, at a time when every man feared to commit his simplest thoughts to paper, did less than enough business to keep themselves in macaroni. They served to exhibit the popular bankruptcy as well as the briefless advocates, who, from thriving on the countless abuses of the law, found themselves abandoned to the lawlessness they had created; as well as the journalists, who, having been brought under a strict moral censorship, starved as vampires might on a diet of milk; as well as the professors and *savants*, who were hampered, it must be confessed, by a thousand childish restrictions in their efforts to make life beautiful by turning it inside out, and to teach men to follow in, themselves, while eating an omelet, the whole process of absorption and digestion; as well as the bolder demagogues, who, mounted on steps or tubs, screamed denunciations of their misgoverning sovereigns, under the transparent veil of Claudius and Messalina, and called upon their hearers, by many classical examples, to strike for liberty and political cleanliness. At which the Lazzari laughed, understanding just so much that, if they were to be no longer flea-bitten, they would be deprived of the traditional luxury of scratching; and shaking their heads over that new idea of equality, which was in fact so old an idea as to be embodied in a popular proverb: "*Tu rubbi a me, io rubbo a te*," which one might expound: "'If Taffy robs me, I rob Taffy'—so what the devil's all this fuss about?" Naples was rich in charitable institutions for the encouragement of indolent beggary; and what sort of a reform was it that sought to deprive an honest loafer of his soup? And so to a

man *they* held out for dirt, moral and material, and for the king who assured them a continuance in both—a condition of things which made revolution a very different affair from what it had been in starving Paris.

Since the date of my first visit in '94 this ferment had been rising, in spite of all efforts of the authorities to check it. As well try to stop the decomposition of a dead body—for such was the national credit. The foolish, vile queen, panic-sick that she was destined to the fate of her better-meaning but as foolish sister in Paris, persuaded her weak, common husband into a counter-blast to the Terror—with as much effect as King James the First's against smoking. It is bad policy to try to suppress an evil by advertising it. Self-martyrdom is the most popular of all notorieties. They inaugurated a system of espionage, which in itself was an education to conspirators; they read Jacobinism across the forehead of all learning, and so alienated the intelligence which might have saved the land; they crammed the filthy prisons with suspects, and broke the hearts and fortunes of those who were the best leaven to corruption; they made it criminal to wear scarlet waistcoats and long trousers; finally, for some such dereliction, or one less momentous, they hung up two or three respectable boys in a public square, varying the entertainment by shooting down some scores of spectators who had fallen into a panic at the noise of a distant musket-shot. And then, having thrown their sacrifice on the flames of discontent, and so lowered them, they settled down with an affectation of the strong arm, and a blindness to the embers smouldering underneath.

These had not ceased to smoulder, nevertheless, feeding on their new fuel; and by and by the blaze was to come.

Eh bien! la voix du peuple est la voix de Dieu! So they say; only, unfortunately, here the Lazzari were the crack in it. It was a pretty Naples I had come to.

One afternoon, while looking out of the window, I

saw a magnificent equipage cross the square, and, turning the corner towards the palace, disappear. I had been waiting during these long days for some such vision, the nature of which now, if, indeed, the plaudits of the loafers had not confirmed it in my mind, was established in the glimpse of a bold, beautiful face which I obtained in its passing. On the instant my resolution was made, and I ran to the table and hastily scribbled off a note :—

"One whom you formerly befriended seeks your help and protection. She is in possession of important secrets, which you cannot afford to discard. Ask for her, under the name of Madame Lavasse, at the 'Orient.'"

I called Gogo, and hurriedly instructed him—

"Lady Hamilton has just passed, driving to the palace. Her coach is gilt, with four dapple-greys. Go secretly out by the back; make your way there circumspectly, wait for her reappearance, and throw this in at the window of her carriage. Then return here, but by a roundabout way, and not till after dark. Be swift and sure. Everything—our safety, our lives—depends on this opportunity."

He groaned out a little sigh: "And our honour, Diana? Think of the time when we shall be damned together, before you betray the child."

I walked up and down in terrible agitation when he was gone. Betray! Who had been the traitor, of us two? Not a drop of water for her, though I were to lie in Abraham's bosom!

Night came, but no Gogo. Tortured with doubts and apprehensions, I could neither eat nor rest. Had he too repented at last of his loyalty, and abandoned me in my need? They all fell from me, those I had succoured and most trusted. Sometimes, in my agony of mind, I upbraided his selfishness, cursed my own irreclaimable fondness in putting faith in man. I believed he had sold himself—whether to cupidity or an emotion, what did it matter. At length, quite exhausted by my passions, I fell asleep on my bed, dressed as I was.

I slept far into the morning, and awoke to a consciousness of a presence in the next room. Was it he, returned at last? Dazed, and sick with excitement, I rose and ran to meet him. A lady only was there, cloaked and mysterious. She lifted her veil, and showed me the face I had desired.

It had not, indeed, so much altered in these years as her person's amplitude. Conceive, my dear friend, the head of a Circe on the body of a hippopotamus! Now I perceived Nature's forethought in the gift of those immense feet. They were disproportionate no longer. She had grown colossal. The mountain had come to Mahomet. It was wonderful how, in spite of all, she could have retained the general fine contour of her features. One would have thought she could hardly have kept her countenance, seeing the changes below. I certainly found it difficult to keep mine, as I fell on my knees before her, and, catching at her hands, hung my head.

She stepped back from me, shaking the room. I understood then in a moment that the old glamour was only to be recovered, if at all, with discretion.

"Now, madam," she said, "being come at your request, I must ask you for your reason, and as short as you'll please to make it."

"My messenger"—I began.

"Your messenger," she interrupted me promptly, "is put under lock and key till we know more about him and you. He got a cut on the cheek before he was took by the guards; but that wasn't my fault."

I buried my face in my hands.

"I thank you, madam," I said, with emotion. "He lies at least in better security than I."

"Well, I won't answer for that," she replied, "till I come to hear what you're after."

I looked up.

"O, madam, my benefactress!" I cried. "It is much to expect, perhaps; but do you not know me?"

"O, perfectly, madam!" she said, with a curtsy that

made her balloon. "We make it our pains to know all about our visitors. Believe me, you was under surveillance from the moment you stepped ashore at the Mole. It was not very likely, was it, that we should overlook the arrival of her as seemed wishin' to reap the discord she had sowed among us a while back? Be sure we know you, madam, well enough, and the reputation you built for yourself in Paris too!"

Startled as I was, I had a difficulty to refrain from retorting that my reputation would bear comparison with hers. But I bit my lip on the temptation, and for the moment took refuge from everything in tears, to which, however, she listened silent.

"I did not refer to that," I cried, looking up with clasped hands and swimming eyes, "but to the goodness of a great and beautiful lady, who once succoured a poor girl in distress."

"And I include that too in my knowledge," said she; "and much gratitude you've shown to the class as befriended you."

"Gratitude!" I cried. "O, believe me, that, until I reached here, I never even guessed that, in conspiring against royalty, I was conspiring against you, my saviour."

She sat down on a chair, near breaking it.

"Didn't you?" she said, gathering the folds of her cloak about her. "Well, supposing you didn't, what then? You ain't goin' to forego your principles for a sentiment like that—don't tell me."

"If you won't believe me"—I murmured despairingly.

"Why look here, Madame Lavasse, or Please, or whatever your damned name is," she said, shaking a hectoring finger at me, "one may help a girl, but a woman helps herself, which I make no bones of guessing you've managed to do pretty free. The question with you is whether Jacobinism or royalty is going to pay best; and if you're proposin' to change about and turn informer, no better moral than profit is at the bottom of your little game, I'll vow. Well, I don't say but in

that case we're open to treat; only I'll ask you to drop the artless girl, which don't sit well on you at your age, and talk with me like one woman of the world to another."

I rose to my feet with a burning face.

"Go!" I said, with an imperious gesture; "insult me no more. Have I not suffered wrong and outrage enough, but my heart must be made the sport of every common"—

"Highty-tighty, miss!"

She rose in astonishment. For a moment she stood conning me, my quivering lips and heaving bosom. Then of a sudden she smiled.

"Well, perhaps"—she said. "There, I've a way of letting my tongue run away with me; but it's no example for you to follow. I should have remembered the glass houses in the sayin' before I twitted you with your past. Only for sure, Diana Please, it can never be said against me that I betrayed my love that betrayed me."

My rage was all gone. I dropped my head, with a sad little cry. The sound of it brought her to my side.

"Was he not your love," she whispered—"him that came with you?"

And I answered, "He was my love."

"Was—was," she repeated. "Well—I see. They take other fancies."

"You was sold yourself—is it not true?" I muttered.

"Ay," she answered, and sighed. "But it was for gold."

"*You* can forgive, then, and forget," I said; "but not I—no, never."

"You would ruin him?"

"Yes, and her."

"Bring him to the gallows?"

"That is why I sent for you. You can trust me."

"And in the meantime you fear for yourself?"

"I struck her. He tried to stab me. I cried, *Vive le Roi!* You know what that means."

"Cry *Vive la Reine* for the future. 'Tis the sweet saint who suffers most. Well, it seems the truth at last; and you have your provocation—by God, you have! Only for me, having one different, to help myself by you?—it goes against my stomach somehow. I wish it was your principles instead of your jealousy."

"Help me in nothing but to some place of safety, where I can inform and direct the court. *It* will not be troubled with your ladyship's scruples."

"How do you know? 'Tis so you have been taught to regard my sweet queen, I suppose?"

"O, madam!" I cried, "you know what made me an ardent pupil."

She stood musing upon me long and earnestly.

"Yes, perhaps," she said at length, and sighed; "what a fool preacher is Love, not to be able to keep his own faith! To drive woman for refuge on woman—'tis like banishing your physician to the enemy's camp. Well"—she took my hands; I thought she was going to kiss me, but she made no offer—"for myself, I don't want to hear none of your inculpations; but I'll put you in train to satisfy your passions on others that may. Will that suit you?"

She turned before I could answer, and was going.

"It must be soon," I urged hoarsely, following her; "O, madam! don't you understand that it must be soon?"

"Within an hour or two," she said, over her shoulder. "I have no fear. You are already protected—and watched."

I set myself, with what self-control I could, to await her return; for, after our emotional confidences, I expected nothing less than that she would come for me presently in person. But in that I was mistaken, as was made evident in the ushering up to me by and by of a very courtly young gentleman, of a shrewd, fallow visage, who informed me, with a bow, that he was Love's emissary.

"His Majesty, sir," I said, with a faint smile, and some intentional ambiguity, "is well represented. Do we go to the palace?"

"We go," he said, "to the palace. Will madam be pleased to accept my escort?"

I took the arm he offered me. In view of some such contingency, I had spent the interval in making my toilette agreeably to it.

He conducted me out by the back way to the stables, where, in a little court, we found an ordinary post-chaise, with two horses, awaiting us.

"*Faire comme on le juge à propos.*" murmured my companion; and, seeing my trunk (pregnant with damning evidence) well secured in front, he handed me in, followed himself, pulled down the blinds, and gave the word. In an instant we were rolling over the stones.

It was a very roundabout way, it seemed to me, that we took to the palace; yet for long—so potent was my trust in myself as an emissary of vengeance, and so engaging the chatter of my comrade—I suspected no treachery. But at length, losing conscious sense, through the thunder of the wheels, of a roar and racket which had once accompanied it, I started as it were awake, and, in an immediate panic, peeped from behind the blind nearest me. And then I saw that we had already left the town, and were tearing along country roads.

I half rose, with a cry: "The palace! This is not the way to it!"

My companion seized my wrist in a grip of steel, forcing me to reseal myself.

"The very nearest, I can assure you, madam."

"You are taking me to prison?"

"My faith! a prison that some would like," he said, showing his teeth.

I struggled with him. "Let me out! I will raise the country else!"

He released me at once.

"As madam wills. Madam will claim protection of

her friends the Jacobins? For me, I consult only her safety."

"What!" I panted at him, sinking back. "Tell me who are you?"

"Luigi de' Medici, at madam's service," he said, with a bow; "a name, at least, that should be a guarantee of some worth."

"No doubt, sir; but, as a stranger, at your mercy"—

"I have the honour to be, madam, the chief of the police."

The word awoke new frenzy in me.

"My God! I am betrayed. For pity's sake, sir, tell me where we go."

"I answered, madam, to the palace. I am a man of my word."

"What palace?"

"Ah! At length madam talks reason. To the Palace of Caserta, ten leagues away."

I stared at him aghast.

"To be immured there?"

"Truly," he said, "to be immured in a paradise, amongst fountains and flowers! It is not like the inside of a wall."

"You are pleased to mock me, sir. But why am I brought so far?"

"Madam shall ask of her mirror," he said, with a charming grin. "Shall I so abuse my office as to admit that His Majesty is susceptible; and that Madame the English Ambassadors—who, nevertheless, is of a perfect honour—is jealous for her friend the queen, and, perhaps, for her own pre-eminence in beauty? Certainly not. It is quite enough to say that Madame Lavasse, being in some danger of assassination in Naples, is removed to a distance for her own security; to a place, in short, whence she can direct the lightning, without exciting suspicion of collusion with Jupiter."

He bent and looked into my face.

"I vow, madam," he said, "that the last frost of discretion must melt in the fire of such beauty. Take

my word for it, that the Queen of Olympus never of her will would have admitted Venus to be of her court."

This was very disarming, to be sure; and already, before we reached Caserta, Signor de' Medici was in possession of some preliminary information that proved useful to him.

XXVII

I KNOW HOW TO WAIT

CASERTA Palace was a sort of Versailles to the Palazzo Reale. It was a fine, long, rectangular building, lofty and imposing in the eighteenth century style of grand architecture, with marble colonnades and innumerable windows. The town it dominated, being a royal town *par excellence*, was comparatively clean and reposeful; and the palace gardens were as extensive and as beautiful as any in the world.

It was not, however, to a corner of this stately pile that I found myself committed, but to rooms in the Casino of St. Lucius, which stood in the park some two miles north of the main building, and commanded a noble view, not only of the surrounding country, but of the dark pruned alleys beset with white statues, and the terraces and fountains and cascades of the gardens themselves—a lovely spot. And here, for the moment secure and at peace, I resolved upon a life of placid enchantment, treated like a queen's hostage, and biding the development of events.

I had my little sleepy, soft-footed household—an old groom, a pretty maid or two, and a quite delectable cook. No restrictions were placed upon me; I was free to wander as I listed, and, indeed, had no inducement to venture without the cordon of sentries who were my best protection. The month was April, the most lovely in all Naples; and, save when Capri, showing near and blue, gave indications of the scirocco, I spent all my days out of doors. So tranquil was it, so remote from the centres of ferment, I could have thought myself in

Avalon, though all the while and around the clouds of a coming tempest were gathering to burst. As I loitered by those empty corridors of green, smiling back the smiles of the unruffled statues, listening to the drowsy thunder of the waters, seeing only for all tokens of human life the little marionnettes of place swarming, quite distant and minute, about the steps of the palace, France was preparing to launch her legions on Naples both by land and sea; scared refugee cardinals were trotting by the dozen into the city; Nelson, off Toulon, was shaping his course, by way of Aboukir, to the arms of Mrs. Hart; Ferdinand was tremblingly fastening his warlike greaves on his fat shins; and, finally, Maria Carolina was making her bloody tally for the hangman. And only of the last was I actively cognisant, seeing that it was there alone lay my concern with the outer world.

From time to time M. de' Medici would visit me in this connection, coming ingratiatory and quite lover-like, to refresh his portfolio with new names from my list, or to examine my correspondence, which was entirely at his service. I had taken no half-measures. The spared assassin comes to strike again, was my motto.

"Have I not proved myself a sincere convert?" I said to him once.

"Assuredly, most beautiful," he answered; and fell to counting on his fingers. "You have given us already certain proof of the guilty complicity of—One: Signor Domenico Cirillo, professor of botany, arborist, edenist, pupil of Jean Jacques, too delicate a flower for this climate; two: Francesco Conforti, court theologian, a priest and ambitious—nothing singular, but he will be beaten in the race for power by a neck; three: Carlo Muscari; four: his excellency the Marquis of Polvica, a lamentable case; five: Pasquale Baffi, professor of dead languages, for which he will soon be literally qualified; six: Gennaro Serra di Cassano, a very pretty young gentleman, late released from confinement—but it is sometimes policy to spare the cub,

if one would learn the way to the dam ; seven :—but, 'tis enough, madam : those six will vindicate you."

"You are welcome to them, monsieur," I said, "if only you would exchange against them all my dear, indispensable Gogo."

At which, as usual, he shook his head, tightening his lips.

"A bond of sentiment. You are better apart."

"At least you might acquaint me where he is?"

"As to that, he is very safe and well cared for."

"In prison?"

"Nominally—nominally, *ma belle*. But, observe—so are you, you know. What then? There are prisons and prisons."

"Well, if he is as well off as I?" I sighed. And, indeed, the assurance was a wonderful comfort to me.

As a matter of course he kept me constantly informed—though I never questioned him—as to the career of the Pissanis, the head and front of all offending.

"Signor Nicola is our bell-wether," he would say. "We have hung a little invisible cymbal about his neck, which has the strange quality of sounding only to us. O, we police are the latter-day fairies, believe me! All unconsciously to himself, he calls the flock about him ; and we—we have nothing to do but keep count of them, till the season of the butcher arrives. Then we shall see. I shall want, perhaps, all the fingers of my own hands, and of yours too—my God, a dainty tally! And madam, you ask—though your lips do not move? It is very laughable, take my word. At once, since her marriage, the dear little frog emulates the bull. O, fie, fie! Madam misreads me. Such a scandal! I would say only that it has inoculated her with her husband's ambition ; that she is become an enthusiast in the cause, attending meetings, distributing tracts, haranguing multitudes in her sweet round voice, that is like pelting giants with sugar-plums. Yes, as madam implies, it is marvellous. What will not love do? But for me,

I am susceptible: I adore all beauty. I could wish the poor child another embrace than the hangman's."

"Well, sir," I answered, "you will have occasion, perhaps, to offer her the alternative."

"O, fie!" he said. "Is not my heart engaged immutably? Otherwise—who knows? It is a sad world."

It was a very dark and bitter one to me from the moment of his revelations. So, she could be independent of me, and happy in her independence! What a world of hypocrisy and double-dealing was exposed in this her easy repudiation of my claims upon her! During all these years that I had counted her my slave, she had been nursing her schemes of treachery—been manœuvring, probably, to make me the instrument of her conveyance to her lover's arms. And now, no doubt, they were laughing over their outwitting of me. Well, who laughs last laughs best.

One day I had a notable visit. Two ladies, walking through the grounds, came upon me where I was seated in a grove of myrtle. One was Lady Hamilton, very great and gorgeous in a shell-shaped hat *de sparterie*, trimmed with butterflies and a violet ribbon knotted under one ear; while the other, whom I did not know, a dowdy, ignoble old figure with watery eyes, wore a plain *fichu-chemise*, and an immense bonnet with a veil thrown back over it. They both stopped upon seeing me, and Lady Hamilton beckoned. I rose, advanced, and curtsied.

"Here, your Majesty," said my friend, "is the very person herself."

Her Majesty! I paled and trembled; then ventured a glance from under my lashes. Sure I was not to blame for my remissness. I vow I could have thought my lady had brought her monthly nurse with her for an airing in the country. The poor woman looked steeped in caudle, flocky with child-beds, and no wonder. In some two dozen years out of her forty-five or so she had borne near as many children. She

had prayed for an heir, and Heaven had sent her a tempest. The eternal lyings-in had soured her temper, which was not further improved by neuralgia and opium. Nursing, as she did, outside her litter, a perpetual ambition to wear the breeches of government, it had been characteristically mean of her husband to adopt this method to correct it. Yet, in spite of all she had borne both from and to her lord, her vigour remained unquenchable. Indeed, in a kingdom which annually abandoned some twenty-five thousand babies to the foundlings, a child was the cheapest present one could make to one's favourite of the moment. Yet, as I saw her now, she was the farthest from imposing or attractive. Her legs were short, and her upper lip so long that her nose stood nearer her forehead than her chin, on the former of which she wore a single fat curl like a clock-spring. She put a hand to it two or three times, before she addressed me, very quick and hoarse, in French.

"*Maria! Mais elle fait une bonne mine à mauvais jeu!* Come hither, child. So this is our redoubtable little *moucharde*? We have need of her in these days of the devil's advocacy."

Her eyes looked injected; her flabby face puckered at the temples like yellow milk skin. As I approached, she turned away in evident pain. Lady Hamilton was all effusive attentions at once. She waved me to stop, and supported her friend to the seat I had just occupied, commiserating, explaining, and fondling in one.

"O, my darling queen! It is the neuralgia that worries my sweet like a dog. Lean on your Emma. Have you nothing, child—no salts, no drops?"

I fetched a certain vinaigrette from my pocket, and bending before the royal knees, snapped the stopper once or twice under the royal nose. The effect was instantaneous. An expression of maudlin relief succeeded to the strain. She lay breathing peacefully, with a smile on her lips, until, after some minutes, she aroused herself with a sigh.

"What was it, then? It is a Circe, with her witch's face and her potions!"

But this was to trespass on the other's domain.

"Give it to me, if you please," said Mrs. Hart coldly. "Her Majesty would prefer to take it from my hand."

I returned it quietly to my pocket.

"Nay, madam," I said; "it is a remedy that must not be repeated."

She looked at me astounded; then broke into a forced laugh. "Hey-day! We are pretty absolute, are we not?" But the queen, grown suddenly very affable and communicative, put her aside with a hand which she laid upon my arm—

"We will not quarrel with our physician. She knows what she knows. Moreover, for all her long exile and the little errors which she has redeemed, she is of the great nation which we love. Is it not so, child? and hast thou heard what are the best and latest news? None other than that thy glorious captain, the supreme Nelson, has within the last few days annihilated the French fleet at Aboukir! Ah! that rose is from thy heart. It speaks the proud blood, the red rose of England, mantling above all foolish sophistries. Thou canst not but rejoice with us in the destruction of the enemies of thy race—of all the world!"

And then she and the other began a little litany of excommunication:—

"Dogs and assassins!"

"Despoilers of churches and women!"

"Hordes of anti-Christ vomited from hell!"

"Scum and rabble of an infamous democracy!"

"Monsters of sacrilege!"

"Cowards curst of God!"

"Whom to slay is righteousness!"

"To whom to give quarter is deadly sin!"

"Subverters of all order and decency!"

"The devil hang the lot!" said Lady Hamilton.

The queen rose, quite refreshed and reinvigorated. Suddenly she was holding me with a piercing look.

Craft and villainy peeped out of her little inflamed eyes.

"I come to put a question to you, madam," she said. "There is a lady of our retinue—the Signora de Fonseca Pimentel. Your correspondence contains no proof of her disloyalty to us?"

"No, madam, or I should have informed M. de' Medici," I answered, in a faint terror; but rallied immediately. "I know only that she is in communication with the Signor Carafa since his escape."

"Ha!"

The red eyes of the ferret closed a moment, then reopened to an ineffable smile. She held out her hand to me to kiss.

"We find you an invaluable physician, Madame Lavasse. To have eased a poor queen—it is something; but to cure this land of its headache"—

"Ah, madam!" I said, "there I yield to the hangman."

Both ladies burst out laughing as they moved away. The queen turned and waved her hand.

"You shall not be forgotten," she cried; and I curtsied.

A few days later M. de' Medici called upon me. He read out a little indictment he had prepared for my behoof—

"Eleonora de Fonseca Pimentel, wife to Pasquale Tria de Solis, Neapolitan officer, noble, now deceased: emotional; authoress of some panegyric sonnets to royalty and the age of gold; since suspect of schemes for the education of the populace; shows a partiality for red; advocates an appropriation of the Punch and Judy shows to the lessons of national virtue; claims the liberty of the press to print her halting rhapsodies;" (Monstrous!) "imputed sympathiser with Ettore Carafa (son to the Duke of Andria, the king's major-domo, and to the duchess, Her Majesty's mistress of the robes) in said Ettore's late conspiracy to print and distribute an Italian version of the 'Rights of Man,' which conspiracy

resulted in the execution of some companion malignants, and the escape from Naples of said Ettore; finally, convicted of corresponding with said fugitive, to the end of His Majesty's overthrow and the subversion of his government!"

"Not convicted, M. de' Medici."

"That is all one, most beautiful," said the chief of police, folding his paper. "Madame Lavasse's word is as good as her bond."

Within a week the Pimentel was lodged in the prison of the Vicaria.

That was in October; and thenceforward things moved fast, though scarce quick enough for me, who was beginning to beat my wings against the gilded bars of my cage. For what was all the national excitement to me but a means to my personal vengeance? And I feared, feared that while I lay aside for others' use, my prey would find a means to escape me.

On the 22nd of September I had heard the guns of the citadels down below in the bay welcoming Nelson's arrival. The sound shook every nerve in my restless heart, so that I could hardly eat or sleep that night; and I laughed myself into hysterics over my little maid Martita's description of how Madame l'Ambassadrice d'Angleterre had flown up the side of the *Vanguard*, and cast herself upon the breast of her hero, who was a very little man, and quite unable to support so much emotion.

Still, thereafter, as day by day drums beat, and recruits were gathered, and men hanged themselves to avoid serving, and the English admiral was urging upon the poor fat, wind-blown king one of three alternatives: To advance upon the French, and conquer; to die sword in hand; or to remain and be kicked out—while all Naples was seething and roaring in a vortex about my garden, the garden itself remained silent and empty, an island in the midst of a whirlpool.

But at last His Majesty *did* set out, and reaching actually as far as Rome, while the republican general

Championnet was falling back for a spring, blustered naughtily for a little, killing a few Jews, threatening the wounded enemy in the hospitals, committing to sack and pillage the very sacred city he had come to relieve, and finally, upon the approach of the concentrated French, deserting his demoralised army, and pelting back, with all the might of his perspiring legs, to where? —why, to Caserta.

It was evening of the 19th of December, and a thunderstorm, to terrify one to death in that desolate park, had broken over the town. All the imprisoned electricity of months past seemed to me, as I stood fascinated at an upper window of the Casino, to have torn itself free, and to be hunting in and out of the trees for fugitives from its fury. Far away and below the thousand eyes of the palace shut sickly to each blaze, and blinked and were staring frightened again in the crash that followed. The hand of an incensed God bent the proud necks of the trees, and His wrath drove a roar of leaves and twigs criss-cross about the alleys. It was the anarchy beginning.

In the midst I saw two figures, cloaked and dusk, butt their way to the door below; and a moment later Martita summoned me to receive messengers from the palace. I went down, and found two officers, pale and glaring, awaiting me in the parlour. The rain dripped from their unbonneted locks; their hands were restless with their hats and sword-hilts. I curtsied in wonder; and the elder, with a shaky, conciliatory smile, addressed me.

"You will pardon this intrusion, madam. The occasion is our excuse. You have in your possession some charm, some restorative, by which Her Majesty the queen has already greatly benefited?"

"Assuredly, monsieur. It is in my pocket now."

"It is much needed at the moment. You will vouchsafe us the loan?"

"You must forgive me, monsieur. Its virtue is incommunicable save by the possessor."

"That is so? Then will madam, perhaps, administer it in person?"

"To whom, monsieur? Monsieur will consider the night."

"Alas, madam! But to assure that this night shall not be endless—that the sun of our hopes be not extinguished for ever?"

"Pray, sir, have mercy on me. To whom do you allude?"

"To His Majesty—no less."

"The king?"

"He has but now ridden—been driven, would be truer—from Albano. For the moment everything seems lost. Ferdinand is at the last extreme of exhaustion and agitation. Madam will come to quiet him?"

"I will come, monsieur."

"Ah! *Dio mercè!* *Questo beneficio è una grande grazia.*"

We set out without delay. My companions took each an arm of me, laughing very gallant scorn of the lightning and my fright thereat. Between them, however, they bruised my poor shoulders, horribly, in their instinctive efforts to come together and clutch one another whenever the thunder slammed.

I was so dazed with the rain and uproar that I had little wit left me to note my surroundings as they hurried me, blown and breathless, up a flight of steps into a great hall, blazing with lights, thronged with confusion. Courtiers, nobles, mud-stained soldiers; weeping women, frightened maids—here they stood in gabbling, gesticulating groups, which were constantly detaching and discharging units into other groups, the whole contributing to a sum of frenzy which swayed the candle-flames. And throughout, threading the frantic maze, went scared pages and lackeys; all, from captain to scullion, looking for orders, and receiving none.

There were a few whispers, a few who observed and remarked upon me, as my conductors forced me through the press, crying a passage to the royal closet.

"It is the beautiful English witch! *O, quanti vezzi!* They are going to try to cure him like King David!"

The opening and swinging-to of a door; as instant a muffling of the tumult; the peace of a lofty anteroom, padded with thick carpets; a muttered challenge, a muttered answer; the passage of a further portal—and I was in the royal presence.

Now, all my life I have had to battle with a fatal sense of humour. I will simply undertake to relate the test to which it was here put.

The room, shut away from all disturbance, was brilliantly lighted. In the midst, at a gorgeous escritoire, sat a secretary in black, biting a pen. Hard by stood a staff officer—in a glittering uniform, but sopped and mud-splashed—who incessantly, with a white, nervous hand, turned down and bit at his moustache, making a motion with his lips as if he were talking to himself. The two all the time followed with their eyes the movements of a third figure, the only other in the room, which went to and fro, up and down, in a sort of tripping dance, gabbling an eternal accompaniment the while to its own *chassé*, and at odd moments ringing a little gilt bell which it carried in its hand. This in itself, to be sure, was sufficiently remarkable; but O, my friend, for the appearance of this eccentric, who indeed was no other than the monarch himself. Cocked on the top of his large head was a little tie-wig, which, for the last touch to disguise, he had borrowed during his flight from the Duke of Ascoli, after exchanging clothes with an apt peer, who was a much smaller man. The effect may be imagined. His Majesty's breeches' ends were half-way up his thighs; his waistcoat was a mere rope under his arm-pits; his coat-tails stuck apart from the small of his back like ill-fitting wing-cases. Add to this that he was pinned all over with holy pictures, and hung with reliquaries and medals like a mountebank at a fair, and the picture is complete.

The lightning penetrated the ruddy blinds with no more than the silent flicker of a ghost; but no glass

could muffle the shattering reports of the thunder, at every clap of which His Majesty whinnied and crossed himself—

“O Lord, spare Thine anointed! Beloved saints, be particular to point out to Him where I am!” (ring). “This, you must know, is not my usual cabinet; but I will withdraw to my own, if you desire it, though it is in the hands of the decorators. There!—O!—San Gennaro, protect me! Caution our Master of the risk of striking among the chimneys, lest the levin brand, following a wrong course, enter this room instead of another, and destroy me in mistake for a lesser man” (ring). “*Dio non vòglia!* O, saints! I believe I am struck! No, it is my breeches splitting. But they are Ascoli’s. Make no mistake, Lord. I am not Ascoli. Take the breeches, but spare the king!”

He shut his ears distracted to a louder boom, and immediately was off again at a tangent—

“O Lady of Loretto, plead for thy servant!” (crash). “*Mea maxima culpa*—I will confess—if your Majesty will condescend to keep it to yourself—I am really a stupid man” (loud ring)—“well meaning, holy mother; well meaning, San Gennaro, but dull, as kings go, and surrounded by greater fools than myself. *I have been seventeen times a father” (ring)—“at least” (loud ring), “and only once a husband” (groan). “Fool though I be, I have propagated my race for the glory of Holy Mother Church—and the confusion of the learned, ner enemies. For the sake of my family, Madonna, succour me!”

He chattered so loud, racing up and down all the time, that I could hear his every word where I stood, awaiting events, by the door. Once, in a lull of the storm, he swooped round my way, and, suddenly becoming aware of me, stopped as if petrified, then rattled out, in a thick, gulping voice—

“Do you know who I am, madam? Do you know who I am?”

I curtsied profoundly.

"Sire," I murmured, "—such a little cloud—to hide the sun of Majesty!"

He stared at me, and down at himself. "I am the king," he muttered; "is it not so?"

The officer hurried to him, and whispered in his ear.

"Eh!" he exclaimed, "my wife's physician? You find me very distraught, madam, very overtasked. I am so constituted I never could abide thunder"—and he was off again.

"Monsieur," I whispered, "if we could get him prostrated on a sofa."

"Ah!" replied the officer, "for myself, it would be madness. But you—you are beautiful—you may dare."

I did not hesitate, but, stealing catlike to a couch, took the opportunity of His Majesty's passing to seize him by his wing-cases, and with such effect that in a moment he was sprawling on his back on the cushions, with his legs in the air. Then, before he could protest or avoid me, I had clapped the duck-stone to his nostrils. Instantly the convulsion of his limbs relaxed, and a great sigh heaved itself out of his depths. His wig had tumbled off; his brows were dark over goggle eyes; he had a long, aquiline nose falling to a slack jaw. Imagine all this revealing itself in an expression of the most perfect contentment and idiocy.

The soldier tiptoed across, and looked down scared.

"God in heaven, madam!" he whispered, "what have you done to His Majesty? He is not himself." —

"Pardon me, monsieur," I said; "never so much so."

He came round in about ten minutes, and gazed at me in a sort of affectionate beatitude.

"*Dio mercè!*" he murmured; "I dreamt I was in purgatory, and awake to find myself in paradise. Another dose—one more."

I shook my head.

"Enough is as good as a feast."

"I will give thee a fortune for thy talisman."

"Its virtue lies in myself."

"Ah! Then the casket must be mine too."

He sat up suddenly, all rumped, and bellowed out in a thick, slurred voice,—

"Away, dolts and rapsallions! What! are you prying and listening?"

The secretary hurried to the door, and disappeared. The officer lingered only to protest—

"Affairs of urgency, sire"—

"Pooh!" said the king. "I am attending to them."

I drew away.

"Pardon me, sire"—I began, when a clap of thunder rattled the glass. His Majesty ran at me whimpering—

"You think to leave me? No, no, madam. I am but half recovered yet. I must be watched, or I shall die. For yourself, you are as safe as in a convent."

He drew himself up, and endeavoured to thrust his hand into the breast of his waistcoat; but not finding any, caught at his braces instead.

"Though all else be lost to Ferdinand, honour remains."

XXVIII

I RETURN TO NAPLES

WHAT a business I had with that father of babies —himself the greatest baby of all! He would not let me leave him, but took my wits to physic his irresolution as my duck-stone his nerves. As the night sped darker and wilder, bringing distracted generals and ministers, who, desperate to gather some clew out of chaos, would not be denied, he clung ever closer to my presence beside him, goggling at me mutely when faced by a poser, and laughing and applauding hysterically when I supplied an answer to it.

At last a cry rose in the palace that the French were got between Rome and Naples, with only General Mack at Capua a little north of us to oppose them.

"He is not to be trusted," cried poor Ferdinand, wringing his hands. "He will sit down there and do nothing! Besides, I am not at war with France!"

"*He* is not everything," I answered, ignoring the other fatuous pretence. "Quick, now, and light a fire between!"

"A fire!" said he, aghast.

"To be sure," said I—"the fire of a crusade. Call upon the whole population north of us to fly to arms and exterminate the impious invaders. Declare you are coming to their help, and bid them strive their utmost in the meantime. It may be, in such a war of bigotry, your peasants will do your chief work for you, leaving you no task but to come presently and kill the wounded."

"But," cried the king disconsolately, "they must

know too well already that I have run a—that I have thought it best to retire!”

“Date your manifesto from Rome, sire, and it will give the lie to—ahem! the truth. Quick! we will compose it together; and within an hour you can have it flying north, east, and west.”

He liked the idea. That thought of being reserved to give the unhazardous *coup de grâce* tickled him sensibly. But, though we acted upon it with all despatch, it was helpless to still the rumour of coming disaster. The report of the king's flight and of the army's demoralisation were too well confirmed. Hordes of robbers and cut-throats rose, it is true, at the word; swarms that committed woeful deeds of plunder and outrage and massacre, making the smiling campagna a hell. But these were without concentration or discipline, and as ready, when the lust had bitten in, to torture Italians as French.

And, in the meanwhile, courier after courier, racing to the palace with distorted legends, finished the last self-control of the king, and drove him near morning to order out his carriage for Naples.

Even then, as he went thundering by the dark fields and long glimmerings of the dawn, I was beside him. He would not part with me—with “his councillor, his dear little nurse”—but lavished upon me the wildest eulogies, the most reckless promises, while entreating me all the time to sit tight against him, for his better sense of security in the event of his dosing. And when he *did* dose, and fell upon me—good Lord! it was a nightmare, like having a mattress for a quilt, and with a voice! If his nod had failed to shake Olympus, his snore might have uprooted it.

Long before we reached the capital, the signs of a coming anarchy were increasing about us most wild and threatening. Swarms of excited countryfolk; strings of hard-driven carts loaded with household furniture, shedding a tithe of their contents, to be crashed over or spun aside by other pursuing wheels; haggard soldiers

sobbing children ; cries, threats, *vivas*, furious banter—all went sweeping in one flurry of uproar and motion towards the gates. Sometimes, when we were recognised, it would be to a shout of jubilation : “ *Ohi ! O me beato !* It is our king, our father, come to tell us the devils are singed and scattered ! ” Sometimes it was to a vision of black menace, that surged up, and showed a moment at the windows, and dropped behind in a wake of curses ; more often it was to evoke a scattering volley of laughter, that broke into a regular sing-song refrain : “ *Venne, vide e fuggì, venne, vide e fuggì !* He came, he saw, he fled ! Way for Cæsar, way for Cæsar, who marches for Rome hind-first ! ” The frightened, sweating postilions scourged their sweating cattle, struggling to escape these gadflies, who nevertheless only clung and stung and sung the thicker. But at last we won through, and were in the city, and whipping for the royal palace through denser agitated crowds, which still, through a prescriptive respect, offered no effective bar to our progress.

I will not say but that throughout this ordeal my blood did not come and go the quicker. I will swear, at the same time, that I was always more exhilarated than terrified. To be quit of my weary exile ; to find myself in the thick of events once more ; best, to know that I had won to active co-operation in my revenge the most powerful instrument of all—these, at least, were a sufficient offset to the perils I must encounter in my race to realise them. And it ended to our credit, when all had been said and sung. We reached in safety the Palazzo Reale, where were being enacted, in a more massed and vehement form, the scenes of Caserta. The king, holding to my hand, drove a way for us, with kicks and curses, through the throng.

“ Her Majesty ! ” he yelled.

She was in her apartments, to which he hurried me, scattering maids of honour like fowls. He shut the door upon her and me and himself alone.

"My love!" he said.

She was in like pass with himself. She was going up and down, muttering entreaties to the saints, her stays stuck full of prayers and pious ejaculations writ on scraps of paper. Every now and again she would pluck out one of these in a spasm, dip it in a plate of broth that stood on a table, and swallow it.

"My soul!" murmured the king.

She noticed us all in a moment, and stopped dead.

"Who are you?" she demanded witheringly.

"Angel of my heart, don't you know your lord?"

She advanced quickly, and whipped him this way and that. He was still in Ascoli's clothes.

"Is this all they have left of you, you poor rag of royalty?"

He tried a little bluster,

"How now, madam! I adopted it for a disguise."

"What!" she said, "by revealing yourself? I should have thought that one exposure had been enough."

"Hush!" he said, perspiring; "there is a witness."

"One!" she cried; "the whole nation!" and she left him for me.

"What do *you* do here?" she demanded.

The king put in a word.

"I bring you your physician, madam—our physician. If it had not been for her, your Ferdinando would have lost his mind."

"Better that than his kingdom," she answered bitterly, and stood scowling on me. "I understand, madam, I understand. I called you Circe, and not, it seems, without excellent reason."

"I was persuaded, madam," I said, raising my head. "My honour is as precious to me as your Majesty's. If you have no further use for me, I beg your permission to withdraw."

At which, if you will believe me, this stormy queen ran to a chair, and flinging herself down on it, began to weep violently.

"I am deserted of all," she cried; "in the hour of my tribulation they all forsake and disown me."

The king skipped to her and fell on his knees before.

"My soul," he wept, "all is not yet lost. General Mack"—

"General post," she snapped. "What do you know of your own city, or of the anarchy that reigns in it? It only needed this spark to the mine. All *is* lost, I tell you. They are clamouring for a republic. We shall be sacrificed like the King of France and my sister to the fury of the Jacobins—I feel the knife at my neck—O! O!"

She rose in a frenzy of horror, shuffling her billets like cards to find a trump. "Gennaro, Valentino, Jeromio?" she whispered tearfully, and ended by making a sippet of the hermit. He was old and a misogynist. It was evident for some moments that he disagreed with her.

"Nothing remains to us," she said at last, with a wry gulp, "but flight. We have foreseen it for days. For days, while you have been playing with tin trumpets, we have been transferring our royal effects to the ships: pictures, plate, jewels; the specie from the banks; the last soldi from the treasury. We have seen to everything, I and my sweet darling Emma, my only, truest, and best of friends. Nelson but awaits our signal to take us on board. You must give it him, at once, for this night, do you hear?"

"I will send a message by Ferreri," said the king, rising, with a face as scared now as her own. "I will send Ferreri at once," and he skipped to leave the room.

"Stay!" she cried, in agitation. "Be sure to bind him to the last privacy."

"O, poor me!" said the king, with a spasm of a smile. "Must I then cheat my excise by smuggling my own orders through?"

"It is no time for fooling," cried his angry spouse. "My God! do you not understand? Whether our plan should be suspected by Lazzari or Jacobins, the

result would be the same. To the one it would mean desertion; to the other escape. They would combine at least to frustrate it."

He stared, nodded sagely, and this time stole away on tiptoe, so that the Lazzari in the square should not hear him, I suppose. I was following, when the queen stopped me. Her expression in the act had fallen a little piteous, like that of a smiling saint sitting on spikes.

"Has Circe, then, no ministrations for the anguished of her own sex?" she asked.

I hurried to her. "O, madam!" I cried, "if I might serve *you* alone!"

Nevertheless, the whole present prospect dismayed me. Whither was it their scheme to remove the court, and for how long? and in the meantime, what Government was to represent it? I had immutably ranged myself against my former party, burning my boats behind me. What, now, if that party were to triumph, as I had already seen it triumph wholly and tragically elsewhere? The tables of vengeance would be a trifle turned, I thought.

However, I gained some reassurance on this point from de' Medici, upon whom, in the midst of a distracted rush and scurry, I stumbled in the course of the afternoon.

"Hush!" he replied to my question. "Whisper it not in Gath. You are indiscreet, most beautiful. Listen: *If* we go, it will be but as a fowler withdraws from his nets, that the foolish birds may fly more confident into the lure."

If we go! An event which happened in the morning resolved that question for ever. Ferreri, the poor courier, was hardly sent on his message (luckily a verbal one) when the suspecting mob fell upon him, dragged him all torn and bleeding to the palace square, and there, with savage cries: "A spy! a Jacobin spy," despatched him with their knives before the very eyes of the king, whom they had insisted should be witness to

this proof of their loyalty. The poor monarch tottered back aghast into our midst ; and from that moment the end was sure.

As the day waned, the confusion in the palace waxed indescribable. Tendency, no doubt, there was in the seeming chaos : I, as a stranger, could do no more than commit myself blindly to the stream, resolved in one matter alone—that I would not remain stranded and left behind. All questions of precedence but in flight—of etiquette, of privacy even—were blown to the winds. We were become a mere commonwealth of terror. Great ladies issued puffing and lumbering from their apartments, their arms loaded with goods and dresses, which they tripped over like clowns as they ran ; nervous warriors got entangled in their swords, and lay gasping on their backs like dying fish. I never laughed so much or so hysterically in my life. With all but the almighty family itself it was *sauve qui peut* ; and I was beginning to formulate my own desperate plans, when de' Medici whispered quick in my ear—

“ Follow me without seeming to ! ”

It had been impossible in that frantic crowd, had not my wits already noted his every trick and mannerism. Fortunate in being utterly unencumbered, I pursued the shadow. It led me by intricate ways, out of the light into darkness, out of the tumult into silence, by a back passage through the arsenal, and so down to the waterside, where a little boat with dusk figures was waiting. Without ceremony we tumbled in, and sat panting.

“ Any more ? ” said a voice in my own good English tongue.

De' Medici answered in the negative.

“ Give way, men ! ” cried the officer sharply.

In an instant we were speeding for the bay. The lights quivered and shrunk behind us ; the uproar attenuated, and was drawn out to a murmur. Yard by yard there swelled up before our eyes vast ribbon-girded bulks, that rocked lazily on the tide, tracing

intricate patterns with their masts among the stars. To one of these, the greatest, we galloped, and came round with a surge and hollow lap of water under its quarter. The next moment we were aboard the *Vanguard*.

XXIX

I STILL KNOW HOW TO WAIT

I SING Palermo, "*la felice*," the languorous, the sunny, the lotus island to all shipwrecked mariners. O, those five days in the gulf!—a hundred hours in which to think of nothing but one's crimes, and one's mistake, saving the sinfulness, in not having been born a mermaid. I declare I was not ill myself, except in the illness of others; but to hear the groaning of the ship's ribs mimicked a hundredfold by the straining ribs of my companions was an eternal bone in my throat. As a canary sings the louder the more we talk, so, as the ship talked, the more fervent rose all round the chaunt of suffering—

"O, San Gennaro, grant it passage! O, Santa Maria, I can give no more; you have it all! Father of pity, I am like a squeezed wineskin!"

Then, perhaps, from Lady Hamilton, mistaking, in her prostration, the steward for the admiral: "O, my dear lord! though I cannot rise to thank you, believe me that for all you have done my heart goes out to you." To which the honest sailor would respond, "Give it went, mum, and take the basin."

In truth it seemed the stars fought against us with the sea. The *Vanguard* itself was none too big a vessel. She was what they call, I believe, a seventy-four with two tiers of guns—not a first-rater. I saw her commander sometimes, in the glimpses of the moon. He was not utterly impervious himself to the calls of the deep. His right arm was gone, and the sleeve pinned to his breast. He had a gentle, sober face, blind of one

eye, and the scar of a late healed wound on his forehead. Casually met, I should have taken him for a little mild professor, who had once said *Bo* to a goose and been well pecked for his pains.

We had weighed anchor on the 22nd, and at once run into baffling winds. The day before, the king had received on board a deputation mixed of the marine, the city, and representatives of the Lazzari, who were all aghast to learn that His Majesty projected a withdrawal to his Sicilian capital. He was very short with them. When facts should reassure him of their loyalty, he said, he would return. In the meantime, he left General Pignatelli (a poor bemused creature) as his regent to restore order. He said nothing of his wholesale plunder of the public funds, and was only in a perspiration to escape before it should be discovered. Then he went below, having lighted and flung ashore the brand which was to set the city blazing.

And the following day we sailed for Palermo, in a vessel as full of royal livestock as if it had been a training ship for kings. Besides their Majesties, and as many of their progeny as they could recollect at the moment, there were on board the ineffable Hamiltons; English Acton, their minister and the queen's lover; princes of the blood Castalcicala and Belmonte, and a few others of condition. Amongst us all, from the first, there was little affectation of state, and none of stateliness. It was just a scurry and tumble—an encumbering mass of royalty, in the thick of which the unhappy crew were hard put to it to find quarters. One of the poor children even died of sickness; and the queen screamed lamentations over it whenever she could recall its name.

At length, more dead than alive, we were all pitchforked ashore out of a battered hulk, and carried piecemeal through the city to the old fortified palace at its southernmost end, where, for the next seven months, was to be enacted the royal intermezzo in the tragedy of Naples.

Those months passed lively enough for me. The king, what time he could spare from his hunting and fishing and the building of a new country lodge, was quite my devoted servant, paying my gambling debts—when it sometimes grew beyond my own power to liquidate them—and assigning me the new post, fruit of his own incomparable invention, of stillroom maid to his royal person. He was not really a bad-hearted man; and, if he could only have accomplished his eternal wish to be left alone, and not bothered while others were arranging his affairs for him, would probably have resumed his Neapolitan dominions without vindictive bloodshed, when the way was once paved and swept level for him.

We heeded little (I except, in one main question, myself) the volcanic throes which were wrenching that doomed town across the water while we feasted and played. While Lazzaro and Jacobin, each dominant in his turn, were flushing the kennels with blood; while imperious Nelson, now promoted to his *Foudroyant*, was circling and swooping on and off, issuing edicts, arrogating to himself the lead, in infatuated touch all the time with his substantial mistress; while the French were planting the Tree of Liberty in the palace square, and giving birth, amidst song and jubilation, to the new republic; while, following their withdrawal, Cardinal Ruffo was descending, with his brutish swarms, upon the fated walls, which he was destined to retake in the king's name, the king himself was absorbed in ombre or lansquenet, chuckling over charades, playing practical jokes upon the most reverend Spanish señors of the place, guzzling and drinking, and in every lazy way luxuriating in an utter self-abandonment to pleasure.

And indeed, in that wine-soft climate, there were many temptations to him as to us all. We were like Boccaccio's company, forgathered out of range of the plague, and telling stories to pass the time. The similarity of our condition, in fact, gave me an idea. I

set my wits to work, and became a public *raconteuse*. I invented and told in those days more tales than I can remember, but a selection from which the curious may find included in my *Des Royautés Depouillées*, first published in Paris in 1806.

The series became so popular, that poor Mrs. Hart found her nose quite put out of joint in the matter of her own contributions to the fund of gaiety. She might flop and pose like the most enormous of Greek goddesses; she might assail our ears with her voice, for she had still the remains of a very handsome one; or our hearts with her faculty for mimicry, which, being ill-natured, went deeper. Once my *début* was made, she must be content to play second fiddle; and that did not suit her at all. The result was a coldness towards me, which, by inevitable process, led to my disgrace with herself and her royal mistress, and my dependence, as much for my interests as my safety, upon the favour of the king. The court, in fact, became divided into the party of Diana and the party of Emma, and was much more concerned over our rivalry than over the ultimate destinies of the kingdom.

It mattered little to me, so long as I could keep the interest alive until the moment when my vengeance on a certain couple should be a *fait accompli*. That once executed, the two Sicilies, for all I cared, might disappear under the sea. O, believe me that Nicola Pissani did an ill thing when he loosed an insulted mistress on his track!

It is not to be supposed that throughout those idle months I had once lost sight of my purpose, or had failed to inform myself, through de' Medici, of the real progress of events. And when at last the end came, and Ruffo with his bloody Calabrians was master of the city, and the republic had collapsed like a rotten hoarding, I prepared my hands for their share of the price to be exacted, and laughed to think how great a fool he had been who claimed to represent

Reason by yielding his soul to the passion of a foolish face.

Now, at this end, Naples had become a shambles. Shot and fire and sharp steel, butchery and festering wounds and starvation, had left of the "patriot" hosts but a little mean swarm, that rotted out its remnant life in the prisons, awaiting the holocaust. Pissani and all his high hopes were scattered. The gods had no desire to be worshipped by Reason, missing their perquisites, as this "long-legged Hebe" might well at the first have assured Liberty's apostles, if they had not been at the pains to discard her. She had been in Paris; had seen Reason sit in the churches; had heard the millennium proclaimed, and Olympus echo laughter. And what had been the result? Not till the temples of superstition were razed in all the lands, not till Reason sat in the fields, would the first glimmer of that golden dawn appear. This she knew from the table-talk whispers of the new race, which had decreed the old Titan Nature a vulgarity, and, having overthrown it in the common hearts of men, dreaded nothing but the destruction of the countless schools of sophistry on which its own lease of dominion depended. And I, who had preached, who had been ardent again to preach their crusade against a detestable lie, had been insulted by these wise reformers, and been driven back to pour headstrong wine to the gods of rank desire, and help them to hold the world a market to their passions! O, Pissani had done well indeed!

And yet he was not among the captured.

One day, near the finish, de' Medici accosted me alone in the palace gardens. It was mid-June, and the scent of roses was thick in the air. I looked in his face, and, for all the warmth and fragrance, my heart was winter.

"He still baffles you, monsieur?"

"Most beautiful, the man is a fox, or perhaps already a ghost."

"Go on. You have something else to say."

A stealthy smile creased his mouth.

"Keen as thou art fair. Know, then, that his wife is in our hands."

"Again, go on," I whispered. I could hardly breathe.

"We found her like a little torn rat in a sewer—ragged, half starved." He gulped, and looked up with a pallid grin. "Have I not deserved? It is the better half of the bargain. Vouchsafe me my reward in advance."

I paid no heed to his question, asking him only—

"Where is she?"

"In the Carmine."

"And a hostage?"

He shivered, and hung his head.

"I understand you, madam," he muttered. "But she is dumb to all our questions, to all our threats."

I turned away with a laugh.

"And you are a humane man, monsieur, and a susceptible. Well, it is not for me to teach the inquisitor his trade."

"Understand," I said, facing round once more, "that I cannot rest, or live, or love, while this remains unaccomplished."

He did not answer; but, standing irresolute a moment, shrugged his shoulders and left me.

But I knew at last that the moment was near.

On the 22nd of that same month the penalties of rivalry were ended for Lady Hamilton by the arrival, in the *Foudroyant*, of the Lord Admiral, who came to transport his mistress to Naples, as Her Majesty's deputy in the latest Reign of Terror inaugurated in that capital.

A fortnight later the king himself, taking me with him as his simpler and nerve-doctor, and leaving the amiable English Ambassador behind to play dry-nurse to his queen in Palermo—followed in the *Sea Horse*, which, after a short fair passage, anchored in the bay. Thence, rather to my annoyance, we were transhipped

no farther than to the *Foudroyant*—his mightiness being timid for the moment of venturing into his distracted city—and, there, were scarcely on board before my services were called into requisition in an odd enough connection.

The king—Nelson and his *cara sposa* being gone ashore—was looking idly out seawards over the taffrail of the quarter-deck, and chattering desultorily with members of his suite behind him, when he broke off abruptly to stare under his palm at some object in the water, which, first seen at a distance, grew rapidly nearer, drifting with the tide upon the ship. Then, in an instant, he gave a hoarse scream; and, seeing him pointing and articulating confusedly, we all ran to the side, and followed with our eyes the direction of his hand.

"*Vátene!*" he shrieked: "*è Caracciolo!*" and he shuddered down, so that nothing but his nose and goggle eyes were peeping over the railing.

I held my breath, staring fascinated, while the others echoed his cry: "*Caracciolo! è Caracciolo! O me miserábile, Caracciolo!*" in a dozen accents of terror.

I had heard of the poor scapegoat admiral,¹ whom Nelson—always bearing a grudge against him for his better seamanship—had caused ten days before to be hanged with every refinement of savagery, and afterwards flung into the water. Now risen, it seemed, from its first sleep on the floor of the bay, the sopt and dreary spectre was come riding to sear the eyeballs of the master, whom it had failed to serve only through being deeper pledged to humanity. Fouling our hawser, the body swung upright, bobbing and reeling as if it were

¹ The unhappy patriot Caracciolo, whose hurried execution at the yard-arm of the *Minerva* raised such a storm of mingled protest and justification at the time. Madame Please's insinuation must be accepted, if at all, as characteristic; yet there is no denying that Caracciolo's court-martial (on a charge of deserting his king; to which the culprit pleaded very reasonably that it was his king who had deserted him), conviction by a narrow margin of votes, vindictive sentence, and hasty despatch thereon, afforded the great captain's enemies the means to as unpleasant an indictment as any they could bring against his conduct of this unhappy Naples business.

treading water. Its hair and long beard swayed on its cheeks ; its dead stiff eyes stared unwinking in the spray ; its arms were flung wide, as if inviting its destroyer to a mocking embrace. Turning a moment, it drifted loose, and went dancing towards the shore, where the poor fishermen of Santa Lucia, who had loved the man, were to find and give it Christian burial.

The king staggered back.

"Mother of saints!" he sobbed, "what does the creature want?"

"Sire," whispered a voice, "he asks for a consecrated grave."

"Give it him, give it him!" gasped His Majesty, and signed to me to follow him below, where, however, I was not long in laying his "horrors."

"*Enfin, mon père,*" I said, "the man, by his appearance, was only asking your forgiveness."

"Magnificent," he answered, with a shaky laugh. "He was certainly in need of it"—and he turned to me gratefully, but with a rather scared look.

"Little agent of Providence, if thou hast ever a poor friend thou wouldst save in the dark time coming, ask of my Majesty's mercy, and it will listen. There may be some who err through the mind's nobility. Of that I know nothing ; only—only, I would have something to balance my possible mistakes."

It was true enough, though the blood-lust was not long in mastering him, when once, without risk to himself, he could taste the spice of vengeance. Even while he spoke the depleting of the gaols and prison-ships was begun, and the hurried trials, and the false testimony, and the hangings. And the wail of the thousand doomed was already mingling itself in the streets with the roar of a grand State lottery, when at last we could venture ashore and to safe quarters in the reconsecrated palace

We were all triumphant then, or about to be. I remember the last night we spent on the *Foudroyant*. It was a full moon ; and, seated under an awning on

the upper deck, Lady Hamilton sang "Rule Britannia," with a cockney fervour which must have pierced reassuringly to the ears of the poor wretches imprisoned behind the floating walls that surrounded us. She was always so much more than equal to the occasion, was Emma.

XXX

I AM JUSTIFIED IN MY POLICY

IT was a dark and gusty night when I issued forth with de' Medici from a side door of the palace.

"She is condemned," he had whispered to me a minute earlier.

A needle of ice had seemed to enter my heart. The question my lips could not ask had flown to my eyes. Comprehending it, he had caught at his throat and lolled out his tongue grotesquely. To the same dumb inquisitors he had answered, as confidently as if I had spoken, "To-morrow."

Then I had found my voice, as if after a fit of choking—

"And she has not spoken?"

"And she has not spoken."

He had hesitated, before suggesting deprecatingly, "There remains only to make your appeal to her in person."

I had struck my hands together, hearing that.

"You might have forced her, had you chosen. Now, leaving it to me, our bargain is dissolved."

"Madonna, you will not so requite my faithful services?"

"I will answer nothing till I have seen her."

"Then what time like now?" he had replied desperately, "when she sits buried alive in the darkness, with the spectre of to-morrow whispering in her ear."

"It is well spoken, then. I will go."

The town was so full of reek and passion, that, most in the low quarters it was necessary for us to traverse, I doubt if I could have survived without him. But he was too well known and feared to leave my safety much in question. Then the Lazzari and their allies of the conquering army were such sworn blood-brothers, that it needed never more than the smallest bone of dispute to set either tearing at the other's throat, whereby a flying petticoat, circumnavigating both, was able to avoid shipwreck between. Indeed, we had committed more than one red scrimmage to our wake by the time we were arrived, breathless but whole, at the door of the Carmine.

A roar and drift of torches surged upon us from a side alley at the moment that we reached our goal. Here was a wave of passion broken from the main wastes, and bearing forward on its crest a single victim to its fury, whom it seemed about to fling against the sullen walls of the prison. He was a mere boy, and his face as white as wax. By the door stood a Calabrese sentry, armed with a musket and a great sabre, and a rose in his hand, the gift thorn and all of some amorous *contadina*. As the boy was hurled up the steps, "Smell to this, poor lad," said he; "art faint?"—and he thrust the rose violently against the victim's nostrils. The poor wretch staggered back, uttering a horrible scream, his face bathed in blood. There had been a long pin concealed among the petals, which had stung him almost to the brain. I am not sentimental, but I shall hope some day to be to that Calabrese in the relation of Lazarus to Dives. The mob, however, roared laughter over the jest, clapping their victim with a certain good-humour on the back, as we were all carried together in a confused struggle up the steps and into a vaulted stone hall beyond.

This stronghold, massive and mediæval, had only lately been the scene of the treacherous massacre of a patriot garrison, and its stones were yet mapped and mottled with the story of the deed. And since, being

made a State butchery, without regard to accommodation or cleanliness, from every carrion Jacobin, it seemed, had emerged a living swarm, predestined children of the grave, who haunted the corridors with unclean cries, and showed ghastly visions of wounds and suffering at the grates as we hurried by. It was a catacomb, in whose rotting lanes of stone walked a hundred vampires, gloating over their huddled pens of victims.

Typical of the worst was the gaoler who, at de' Medici's summons, had risen to attend us. This was a creature, like an obscene lank bird, who hopped before us chuckling and pecking forward with his long nose, as if as he went he sought the corners for offal. At his waist jingled a bunch of keys, and often he cracked, after the Italian habit, a thong of leather with a lash which he carried in one hand, his other being occupied in holding aloft a flaring taper. He led us by a descending passage, so narrow and so low that the flame of his torch made sooty blotches on the roof as he advanced, into a murmuring drain, at whose termination he at length paused before a door sunk in the wall.

"*Guidi a lei*, Messer de' Medici," he chuckled, as, groping for the lock, he leered round at us. "Wait till, having opened, I can block the passage. There is another here besides our little bird."

"Another?"

"Courage, most excellent; 'tis but half a man when all's said. He was a State prisoner in the Vicaria, until the mob released him with the rest. Then he disappeared, God knew whither; but he was retaken, with a few more, in the prisoner Pissani's company. Well then, his day will come, no doubt; and in the meantime, waiting orders, we keep them caged together."

De' Medici grunted, rubbing his chin, "I should have been told; but, hurry, friend."

The man waved him back.

"Let me entreat messer, in case of an attempt."

The chief withdrew a little.

"Open, and come thou too," said he. "Madam would speak alone with the condemned."

The key grated in the lock; the creature flung wide the door.

"Pissani!" cried he, on a sharp note; and that was all.

Even as he retreated, having uttered his cry, she stood in the opening. A dank and mortal odour came with her, a reel of filthy darkness unbroken but by the dim splotch of a tiny grating, which, set in the wall opposite, made an aureole behind her head as she stood.

God of mercy! It was a spectre from which I shrunk in instinctive loathing. Had it ever been one with beauty, and with me? Its very tattered gown seemed fallen into harsh, lean folds. Love must have trodden, not sat, in those hollow eyes, so to discolour and bury them. It was a just retribution—the more providential in that so squalid a vision sickened my heart from sympathy.

Yet, to break this withered reed! It seemed a despicable task for my strong hands. They must withhold a little, caress a little first, with whatever reluctance to themselves. Nevertheless, I could not but be conscious how forced and artificial rung the tenderness I sought to convey into my voice.

"Patty—Patty Grant! I have come to offer you life and liberty!"

The tiny smile that broke then from her lips was my first earnest of her reality. The sigh she gave was such as a dead sleeper might yield to the dawn of Judgment. Yet she did not move, or come to me, or show one sign of the collapse I had expected and calculated on. And, as the light of the flaring taper fell upon her figure, a new hate and loathing surged in me, so that the persuasiveness with which I sought to dress my tones shivered into a mockery of itself—

"Did you not expect me? Did you not know that I hold your life in my hands?"

"Else why should you have left me to come to this, Diana?"

I shrunk back. What new knowledge of herself, or me, was implied in the chords of that wasted voice? Yet she smiled still, like one waking out of a frightful dream.

"Is it not strange, Diana, this end to all we have known and experienced together? Do you remember the sundial, and the old green garden, and the nuns in the sleepy village? We are Englishwomen, after all, Diana. I should like to rest in England."

"It lies with yourself," I answered, half choking. "You have but to speak—I tell you, it needs but a word from you, and all this false sacrifice is passed by and forgotten."

Her eyes had been fixed on some vision beyond me. Now in a moment they were scorching my soul.

"Yes," she said, "and the word?"

The shame of its utterance should be mine, she meant. If I had shrunk from the challenge, it would have been to discredit my claim to the greater wrong.

"Where your husband lies hidden?" I said, with a cold fury at my heart.

"God forgive you," she answered only, and fell back.

Her assumption of the holier strength, of the worser grievance, stung me to madness. I leapt and clutched her by the wrist.

"Fool!" I shrieked; "do you know what you are bringing on yourself? Do you know how they will kill you? It is not, as in Paris, a shock, and a sob, and forgetfulness. They will push you from a ladder, and one will spring and swing himself by your feet, and another leap upon your shoulders, and squat there like a hideous toad, making sport for the crowd. And you will be minutes choking and dying, and not one to pity or relieve you!"

Her eyes had a smile of agony in them; but still

it was a smile, and I could have torn myself in my impotence to change it.

"Ah, yes, one!" she said; "my little unborn baby."

I sprang back.

"Wretch! Your obstinacy murders it!"

"It gives its life for its father!"

Without sound or warning, she sank at my feet, and lay motionless, her white face turned upward.

A harsh jest was uttered at my shoulder.

"Bravo! It is so they always think to sport with our feelings. But we have an infallible medicine"—and the gaoler, coming from behind me, cut across the senseless face with his whip.

With a roar, a figure bounded out of the darkness of the cell, and whirling long arms about the beast, fell with and upon him, and battered out his brains upon the stone floor. It all passed in a moment; and in that moment I knew my lost monster again, gaunt and foul and tattered, yet even in his wasted strength a god, and glorious. Then against a coming tumult and scurry of feet I flung my body.

"Back!" I shrieked, "the king gives me a life! I claim his—do you hear? If by a hair it is injured, the bitter worse for you all!"

Sobbing, burning, in a flurry of passion, I threw myself, an hour later in the palace, at the king's knees.

"Sire," I cried, "I claim your royal promise. I ask mercy for a friend."

Taken off his guard, bewitched, perhaps, "It is granted," he said.

Then he recovered himself, and laughed, and patted my shoulder.

"*Enfin*," he said; "what has he done?"

"He has killed a gaoler who was ill-treating a prisoner."

He startled, frowned, then laughed again, but less easily.

"O, well," he said, "a gaoler is no great matter. But I must know his name first."

"Sire, it is my own servant Gogo, that you have robbed me of this long time."

"O, him!" he said, relieved. "Well, perhaps, after all, we owe him a gaoler or two."

XXXI

I KNOW MY OWN HEART

I HAD hardly got into the street before a hand touched my arm. I turned and saw Gogo.

"It was you," he said, "won my deliverance this morning?"

"Yes."

"From the king?"

"From the king."

He said not a word more. I questioned him in my turn.

"I sent you a message by the courier. Why did you not come direct to me?"

"I had business first. I answered, 'If you will tell her that I will witness for her and bring my report this evening, she will understand.'"

"I understood nothing but that you were in no hurry to thank me."

He made no reply.

"It is only after a struggle with my pride, sir," I continued, "that I am here to keep your appointment. I think, perhaps, your business might have kept better."

"Do you? Well, perhaps, after all, you have a shallow wit."

I looked at him in dumb amaze. We were loitering on, to me aimlessly, though I knew presently how all the time he had been rigidly enforcing our direction. The city was in its hottest night-fever of excitement over the executions that had taken place that day, in a mood already too monstrous to take much heed of the shock and tattered prodigy that stumped by my side. Once, passing a group, I caught a name, and

startled, and was hurrying on; but he snatched my wrist, and forced me to linger, absorbing horror to the dregs. I knew his temper by that, and to what I had delivered myself; but I never feared him so much as when he would not speak.

"Gogo," I whispered suddenly, "you will give me credit for having known nothing of your state all this time. Whenever I asked M. de' Medici, he assured me of your comfort and prosperity. I am not to blame if he is a cursed liar."

He did not answer.

"The moment I could," I said, trembling, "I begged your life. It is the dearest of all I know to me. Are you going to punish me for that?"

Still no answer.

"O!" I said, with a little rally to anger, "if you will not thank me, at least you might say whether or not you received my enclosure this morning?"

"The money?" he muttered. "Yes, I received it."

I was moved to a little agitated laughter.

"Is everything poisonous that comes from my hands? If you had spent a little of it on food and clothes, my obligation to you would not have been the less."

"I thought you sent it to me to pay your debts."

"What debts?"

Again that grim silence. I feared him more than I can tell; feared him so much that no thought of the conquering guile by which I had once been wont to sway him occurred to me to use. I shivered, and drew my cloak faster about me, and hurried by his side without another word.

Whither was he bent? By the roaring quays, it seemed, towards the dark prison from which, only a few hours earlier, she had gone to her self-elected doom.

"Not there!" I sobbed, struggling—"not there! What good can it do now?"

But he turned, short of reaching it, to his left, into a street leading to the great square adjoining, where the gallows was erected; and here, under the shadow of the

fortress, stood a church with a lofty tower. Stopping at a door which opened into the base of this last, he tapped three times; and in a moment it yawned, and engulfed us, and the tumult of the living town was become in our ears like the murmur of the sea in a dead cavern.

Our guide, taper in hand, went on before us. The sound of our footsteps reeled and laughed behind, echoing up to unknown altitudes. 'Ward of that little star of radiance, I had no terror so great as that of its flashing away and committing me to the shadows that seemed always dancing and clutching for me outside its circumference. And then suddenly we were come to a narrow iron gate set in the stone, and to the cowed, motionless figure of a monk who stood thereby.

Without a word uttered by this spectre, the folds of its robe contracted, and a long white hand was thrust forth palm upwards. Gogo put a purse into it.

"Bear witness, Diana," he said, in a low voice, that boomed and clanged among the stones, "that I deliver the account of my stewardship to the last penny."

I was sobbing dreadfully, moved by some terror that had in it, nevertheless, no thought of evil intended by him to myself.

"You will take nothing from me?" I gasped.

He addressed the monk.

"It is enough?"

The cowed head bent.

"Then let us through, father, and alone."

The grate clanked. He gripped my arm, and, seizing the taper from the sacristan, led me down a long flight of steps, through a low doorway, into a crypt. And there, on the damp ground, full in our view, was something lying, and a sheet over.

"No, no!" I screamed. "You have tortured me enough already!"

Never releasing my arm, he set the taper in a crevice, and dragged me to the dreadful bed.

"What!" he said, "are you afraid to look on your work?"

And, pinning me forcibly, he bent and drew the cloth away. And side by side with the other, I saw the dead face of Pissani.

Without a word, I sank down where I stood, and he fell back from me.

"O, woman!" he cried, in a terrible voice, "that you could talk of your pride, with this lying at your heart!"

He clasped his hands, and unclasped them, and struck his forehead, and again writhed them together, as if his grief baffled him from speech. Dragging my body towards him, I huddled cowering at his feet.

"What!" he cried; "no word? no word?"

I moaned, and moved my head in negative.

"Grant he stabbed himself under the gallows," he said, "since he found he could not look on her agony and live. Are you the more guiltless of his death?"

Again I shook my head.

"At least they are together," he cried. "By so much you did them service, sending her first. But the price, woman, the price!"

I rose, blind, staggering, to my feet.

"It was my honour. I will go and pay it, and die."

He caught at and held me.

"To whom?"

"To de' Medici. Let me go. Only you could have saved me, and you will not; and it is right."

Never quitting his hold, he turned from me, with a wild gesture of his free arm.

"It was her life or yours," I said. "Make it my curse, if you will, that I chose the dearer to me."

With a mad groan, he snatched me from my feet, and, holding me fiercely against his breast, carried me out and to the foot of the steps.

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